

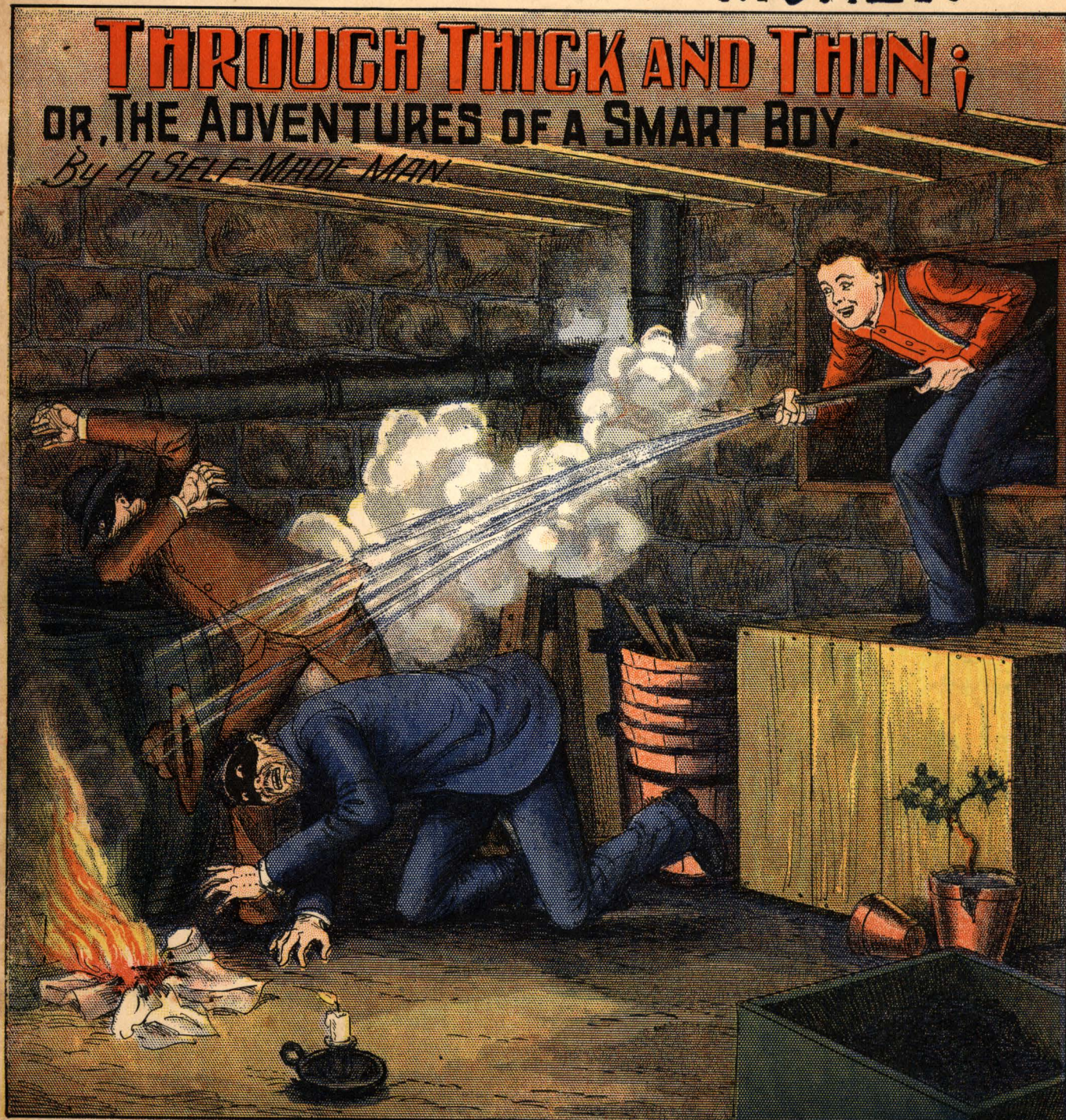
No 46.

5 Cents.

FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

THROUGH THICK AND THIN; OR, THE ADVENTURES OF A SMART BOY. *By A SELF-MADE MAN.*



The masked men were taken completely by surprise when Bob Ford suddenly appeared at the cellar window and turned a jet of boiling hot water full upon them, peppering them and the fire they had started with equal impartiality.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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Price 5 Cents.

Through Thick and Thin

OR,

The Adventures of a Smart Boy

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

CAST ON THE WORLD.

"Where have yer been all day?" asked Mr. Maddox, taking his pipe from his mouth and regarding with an ugly frown a bright-looking, but poorly dressed boy of fifteen who had just entered the shabby room where the man was sitting with his dirty shoes perched upon the sill of one of the windows overlooking the river which ran past the busy town of Factoryville.

"Looking for work," replied Bob Ford, rather doggedly, for he had little respect for the man who stood in the relation of a half-uncle to him.

"Lookin' for work!" sneered William Maddox, in a nasty tone, habitual with him when he was out of humor, which was about four-fifths of the time. "Yer alwuz lookin' for it, but yer don't seem to find it. Yer don't want to find it," roared the man with an oath, smiting the arm of his chair. "If yer did yer'd find it soon enough. I'll bet I could find work in five minits if I wuz to try. Ye're a lazy, good-for-nothin' kid, that's what yer are!"

The boy looked at the great husky man in the chair, and wondered why he didn't go to work himself if he thought it was so easy to find something to do that would bring in the money so sadly-needed in the Maddox home.

No one, however, could accuse Mr. Maddox of hurting himself with hard work.

Once upon a time he had been a fairly industrious mechanic—that was when he married Susan Gray, a half-sister of Bob's mother, and before he made the unpleasant discovery that the world wasn't giving him a square deal.

Owing to a strike for higher wages and shorter hours, which in the end was unsuccessful, Maddox, six years before the opening of our story, had lost his position in the shop where he was employed.

He attended the strikers' meetings with his fellow workmen, listened to the arguments of plausible orators, and soon became thoroughly dissatisfied with the condition of things generally.

A few moneyed men, who resided in sumptuous residences on the suburbs of Factoryville, seemed to be getting richer and richer every day on the sweat and labor of the less fortunate majority.

They and their families rode about in their carriages, and lived on the fat of the land, while William Maddox and his associates worked ten solid hours a day in their factories and workshops, for what they considered a mere pittance.

It wasn't fair.

It was an outrage.

That's the way all the speakers put the matter, and Maddox and his fellow-workmen applauded the sentiment, and agreed that things must be changed to suit them.

But all the same things weren't changed.

Strike-breakers were imported to Factoryville, there

were endless scraps, one establishment was burned down through incendiarism, and in the end the strike failed.

The men went back to work at the old wages, and the same old hours—that is, those whose places had not already been filled by outside labor.

Maddox was one of those who decided that he had been a slave long enough.

He was disgusted with the existing order of things, but instead of moving away from Factoryville, and trying to better his condition elsewhere, he stayed in town and adopted the hazardous experiment of trying to live without worrying himself about where the necessary money was to come from.

That, as we have said, was six years ago.

Mr. Maddox soon used up all his savings, and then he and his wife began to slip down the toboggan toward absolute poverty.

How they managed to exist after the first year of this experience no one outside of themselves knew.

Four years elapsed, and they still managed to keep the roof of the shabby little cottage over their heads.

Then something happened that gave them a slight lift in the world.

Bob Ford's mother, his only surviving parent, died, and the boy was thrown upon the world at his thirteenth year.

When this news reached the ears of Mr. Maddox a brilliant idea occurred to him.

He would offer the shelter of his home at Factoryville to the lad, see to it that he got work in town, and then he and his wife would enjoy the fruits of their philanthropy.

It was a great scheme, and it worked very nicely for two years.

Now, however, a second strike had demoralized the industrial conditions of the town, and this was followed by a lockout on the part of the factory and shop-owners, so that there was scarcely any work to be got in Factoryville these days.

And these conditions had been in force for several weeks.

Mr. Maddox didn't relish the situation for a cent, because his young breadwinner had been thrown out with the others.

As there wasn't a lazy bone in Bob's body, and because he felt a great sympathy for the unhappy lot of his mother's half-sister, tied as she was to a man who made life miserable for her, he tried hard to get work.

Because he couldn't get work to speak of, Mr. Maddox vented a portion of his ugly humor on the boy, and Bob, who didn't consider himself under any obligations whatever to him, was getting tired of being browbeaten.

"I said yer wuz a lazy, good-for-nothin' kid, d'ye understand?" snarled Maddox, blowing a cloud of smoke from his mouth.

"I heard you," replied Bob, starting for the little kitchen in the rear of the house where he guessed he would find his Aunt Susan, as he called her.

"Yer heard me, did yer?" snorted the man, dropping

his feet to the floor and wheeling his chair about. "Where yer goin'?"

"To the kitchen."

"Well, there ain't no call for yer to go in the kitchen'. Them as don't earn their vit'als in this house ain't got no right to eat."

"I guess I've earned more than I ever got here," retorted Bob, defiantly.

"What's that?" demanded Mr. Maddox, furiously.

Bob saw that Maddox was in an especially bad humor, and apparently looking for trouble, so he made no reply, but opened the door and entered the kitchen.

The man, with an oath, kicked over his chair and followed him.

Mrs. Maddox, who felt thoroughly grateful to Bob for his efforts in their interest, and always treated him as kindly as circumstances permitted, had kept warming on the stove the meager remains she saved for him from their dinner.

A plate and a cup and saucer stood on the kitchen table in readiness for him when he appeared.

"Well, Aunt Susan," said Bob, "I haven't had any better luck to-day than usual. I tried hard to get some work at Wade & Butcher's, but——"

"You're a liar!" roared Mr. Maddox, now making his appearance with a countenance as dark as a black squall. "Yer ain't tried to get nothin'. Yer don't want to work. Yer want to live off of me. Well, I won't have it. I told yer this mornin' that if yer didn't get somethin' to do to-day yer could get out."

"Now, William," protested his wife, in a conciliatory tone, "Bob has tried, I am quite sure——"

"Shut up!" snarled Mr. Maddox. "What do you know about it? Did yer follow him around to see what he was doin' with himself all day? Of course yer didn't. He ain't done but three or four days' work in six weeks. That's enough to show me that he doesn't want to work, and I've got no use for anybody that won't work."

"But Bob always did work faithfully until the strike and lockout came," said Mrs. Maddox, feeling that it was her duty as well as her inclination to defend the boy, between whom and herself there existed a strong sympathy.

"S'pose he did; that ain't no reason why he should let up now."

"I am sure he would be glad to work if he could get it."

"He can get it fast enough if he'd look for it. But he hangs around strike headquarters, listenin' to them tomfool speakers, and expects he'll get fed when he comes home. Well, I won't stand for it, see? This is my house, Mrs. Maddox, and I'm goin' to run it to suit myself. I won't have no loafers around it, so you'd better get yer duds together and hook it right away, Bob Ford, or I'll freshen your way with the toe of my boot, d'ye understand?"

"William!" exclaimed Mrs. Maddox. "You shan't treat Bob this way."

"I won't, eh?" he glared at her, like an angry beast.

"We'll see if I won't. Go and get yer things and clear out at once!" he roared at the boy.

"Don't you stir, Bob," said the woman, with a flush of indignation.

Mr. Maddox, with a howl of rage, sprang at his wife, and raising his arm, struck fiercely at her.

She was entirely unprepared for this exhibition of ungovernable temper on the part of her husband, and would have suffered a serious injury but for Bob's promptness in springing forward and warding off the blow.

Wild with anger, Maddox turned upon the boy and endeavored to strike him down.

Bob was too active for him, and easily escaped his fist. The man followed him up so hard that he had to run out into the yard.

There Bob dogged him at will, until Maddox in his rage seized a billet of wood and threw it at Bob's head.

Had it taken effect the boy's career of usefulness in the world would probably have come to an abrupt termination.

It missed him by a hair, and smashed the top off one of the weather-stained pickets in its flight.

"This is getting too warm for me," thought Bob, as Mr. Maddox reached for another billet. "The next one may knock me silly."

So, thinking prudence the better part of valor, the boy darted through the gate out on to the river road.

Mr. Maddox came to the gate and shook his fist at him. "If I ketch yer around this place agin I'll be the death of you," he snorted.

Bob saw his Aunt Susan at the kitchen door with the corner of her apron over her eyes, and he felt a strong regret at being obliged to leave her; but for her he would have felt happy at the thought of cutting loose from the society of her shiftless husband.

However, the die seemed to be cast anyway.

Mr. Maddox had practically fired him from the cottage, so there was nothing left for him to do but to shift for himself.

"Good-by, Aunt Susan," he shouted to the only relative he had in the world, waving his hand toward her in farewell.

"Don't go, Bob," she begged, starting for the gate.

Her husband turned around, and seizing her by the arms, forced her back into the house, slamming the door after him.

Then Bob slowly turned around, and, hungry and tired as he was, walked away from the cottage.

CHAPTER II.

A GALLANT RESCUE.

Bob hadn't the slightest idea where he should go.

The world was before him, but it looked like a very cold and unfriendly place at that moment.

He walked away from the cottage at random, not toward the heart of the town, but away from it.

The declining sun was flushing with a ruddy glow the windows of the cheap habitations of the poorer class of

Factoryville's population lining that part of the river, not far from the silent four and five story buildings which before the strike and lockout had each been a busy hive of industry.

Dirty and half-naked children were playing about the dismal-looking, ill-kept yards and the dusty roadway, and coarse-featured women were sitting upon the doorsteps in the shade, inhaling the air from the river.

Their husbands were probably gathered outside of the hall where the strike-committee held forth, or were drinking and canvassing the situation in some saloon nearby.

Bob kept on past these cottages, which were about on a par with the Maddox one, except that Mrs. Maddox kept her yard neat and tidy, and the interior as clean as a constant application of a broom as well as soap and water could make it.

He soon left them behind, and strolled by plots of unimproved ground till he came to the more pretentious dwellings of the middle class of Factoryville's citizens.

Leaving these well-kept homes in his rear, he now approached the aristocratic suburbs, where large and fine dwellings rose amid handsome surroundings, and proclaimed that here was the abode of wealth and luxury, never invaded by the gaunt wolf of want and penury.

The river road at this point was kept in fine condition; great shade trees rose at intervals along the bank, where the soft, luxuriant grass was kept short by the regular application of a mower, and private docks extended out into the water for the accommodation of boats.

From one of these docks, as Bob approached, a small rowboat put off with a little girl in the stern, and a boy of twelve at the oars.

The child was exquisitely dressed in a white frock, with a pink sash about her waist.

Her golden ringlets hung about her shoulders in great profusion, and a necklace of brilliants hung about her throat, catching and retaining the prismatic hues of the setting sun.

"She's as pretty as a picture," thought the weary boy, throwing himself down at the roots of one of the big trees to watch the girl and her well-dressed companion recede toward the center of the smoothly flowing river.

Bob soon saw that the boy had very little knowledge of boats, for he handled the oars awkwardly, and caught more than one "crab" in his efforts to propel the boat forward.

The little girl laughed at him frequently, as if she thought his exertions very funny indeed.

From the expression of the boy's face Bob judged that her mirth jarred upon his feelings.

At any rate, he seemed to be doing his best to make the boat go.

Suddenly he lost his balance by missing the water with the blades of both oars, and tumbled backward into the bottom of the boat.

One of the oars escaped his grasp, and began to float away, while the blade of the other rose shining into the air.

The girl clapped her hands with glee, and her silvery laugh rippled along the shore.

The boy quickly recovered his seat, and then made a grab for the truant oar.

The light boat dipped suddenly.

As the little girl had bent over to watch him pick up the oar, she was thrown off her balance, and fell with a splash into the water.

The bubbling water closed over her face, stifling the shriek that rose to her lips, while her companion, paying no further attention to the floating oar, gazed helplessly at the spot where she had disappeared.

Bob Ford sprang to his feet, rushed down the bank, and out on the wharf.

As he did so a shriek from behind him told that another spectator had witnessed the accident.

The child's sister, a lovely girl of thirteen, had been standing at the gate of the fence which surrounded a spacious well-kept grounds in the center of which stood a splendid mansion, watching the two younger people in some little anxiety, as the boat receded from the shore.

She rushed frantically toward the wharf, calling upon the startled boy, whom she addressed as Freddy, to save her sister Edith.

But Freddy was utterly unequal to the emergency.

He simply sat like a graven image and watched his late companion rise to the surface a yard away, struggle for a moment or two, and then sink for the second time.

Bob, satisfied that the little girl would be drowned unless he was able to reach her in time, threw off his hat, jacket, and shoes, and sprang into the water.

He was a splendid swimmer, fortunately, and cut through the water like a fish.

But it was quite impossible for him to cover the distance between the wharf and the scene of the accident before little Edith disappeared the second time.

In a moment or two she came up again.

Bob saw the glint of the waning sunlight on her necklace, and made a dash in that direction.

He reached her just as the water was closing over her unconscious form for the third time.

Grasping her firmly by one arm, he struck out for the shore with the other.

The girl on the wharf watched their approach with a tearful, earnest gaze, her hands clasped prayfully across her breast.

Bob urged himself through the water as though it was his natural element.

He held the child's face well above the surface, so that there was no danger of water entering through her half-parted lips.

In this way he soon reached the beach formation of the bank, and when his feet touched bottom he gathered the little girl in his arms and walked ashore.

Her sister flew to his side as he ascended to the road.

"My darling sister!" she cried, the tears streaming from her beautiful eyes. "Don't say she is dead! Don't, please!

Oh, she is so white and still! What will mamma and papa say?"

She wrung her hands in a paroxysm of grief.

"Your sister isn't dead, miss," replied Bob, soothingly. "She'll be all right in a little while. I reached her just in time."

"Are you sure? Oh, are you sure she'll live?"

"Certainly I am. Open the gate please so I can carry her through."

"You are a brave boy!" cried the elder girl, fervently. "You have saved my sister. I shall love you as long as I live," she added impulsively.

Their approach was observed from the veranda of the mansion, and some commotion ensued there at once.

A bare-headed lady, clad in a pink summer gown, sprang down the steps, followed by a fine-looking gentleman, and rushed to meet them.

"Myrtle, what has happened to Edith? Heavens, what has happened to her?" cried the lady, her face suddenly going white as she saw her youngest child lying still and pale and dripping in the boy's arms. "Oh, Father of Mercy, she has been in the water! My darling! My darling!" she cried hysterically, as she snatched Edith from Bob. "Look up and speak to mamma. Speak to me or I shall go mad!"

"Don't worry, ma'am," said Bob. "She'll come around all right. Carry her into the house, undress her, and give her a good rubbing."

The well-nigh distracted mother rushed away with her child, paying no attention to her husband, who tried to relieve her of her burden.

He followed in his anxiety, and so did the child's sister, leaving Bob to himself.

"I'm in a pretty state to continue my tramp," said Bob to himself. "I suppose these people will let me dry my clothes, and maybe they'll give me something to eat. Well, I'll go back to the wharf for my jacket, hat, and shoes."

Bob returned to the wharf for his things just in time to see a boat from another dock put out to the rescue of Freddy, who could do nothing at all with one oar, and but for this timely assistance must have gone floating down the river.

While Bob was watching the rescue of Master Freddie, he was hailed from behind by a man's voice.

He turned around and saw a person, who proved to be the gardener of the place, shouting and beckoning to him.

Bob made his way to the gate.

"Mr. Hastings wishes to see you," said the man, opening the gate.

"All right," replied the boy. "But I'm all wet. I should like a chance to dry my clothes."

"You'll have plenty of chance to do that, young man, before you leave here, I'm thinking. You saved Miss Edith's life, and you'll find that Mr. Hastings will do the right thing by you."

"Well, if he gives me something to eat, and a place to

sleep to-night, he'll do the right thing, and I shall be much obliged to him."

"It seems to me, young fellow, that you don't realize that you have done a big thing for yourself," said the gardener, as they walked toward the house.

"I don't know as I have done more than my duty. You don't suppose that I was going to look on and see that little girl drown before my eyes when I can swim like a fish, do you?"

"I suppose not. Still, some people would think twice over the matter. Here comes Mr. Hastings. I will leave you to introduce yourself."

CHAPTER III.

BOB LANDS IN EASY STREET.

Mr. Warren Hastings, who now came forward with gratitude in his heart to greet Bob Ford, was the most prominent business man in Factoryville.

He was president of the Factoryville Woollen Mills, the largest establishment in the town, and it was his mills which had initiated the lockout immediately after his six hundred employees struck for higher wages and shorter hours.

As the other mills in the place had followed his example, he was the most unpopular man among the working class in that section of the State.

He was also accounted the wealthiest man in Factoryville.

At any rate, he had the finest residence in the neighborhood, and the Hastings lived in a style that only a fat income could afford.

He took Bob by both hands and shook them warmly.

"You have placed me under an obligation that I never can repay, my lad. You have saved the life of our little Edith. I want to know your name first of all, and then you must remove your wet clothes so that they can be dried."

"My name is Robert Ford."

"You live in Factoryville, or in the immediate neighborhood, I suppose."

"I did live in town until an hour ago."

"Until an hour ago? You were leaving the neighborhood, then, to go elsewhere?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long have you lived in Factoryville?"

"About two years, sir."

"Your father and mother——"

"Are both dead."

"With whom were you living?"

"My mother's half-sister."

"Were you working at one of the mills before they shut down?"

"Yes, sir."

"At which one, may I ask?"

"At the Empire State."

"Ah! My own mill, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"And I presume lack of work is the cause of your leaving your home?"

"It is one of the reasons—probably the chief one."

"It will not be necessary for you to leave for that reason now. I will see to it that you get immediate employment."

"I am much obliged to you, sir; but I would prefer not to return to Factoryville for the present at least."

"Come with me and I will talk with you further after you have taken off your damp clothes. You have had your supper, I suppose?"

"No, sir. I have had nothing to eat since this morning."

"You astonish me. Then you shall have your dinner with us. I think I will be able to fit you out temporarily with some clothes. My gardener has a son of about your age."

Mr. Hastings rang for a servant and gave him certain orders.

In a short time he returned with a bundle of clothes to the room into which the owner of the mansion had introduced Bob.

"Now, my lad, take off your sodden garments and put on these."

Bob hastened to do so.

"Now, Robert, do you care to tell me your reasons for not wishing to return to town?"

"Well, sir, I am sorry to say that it is on account of my Aunt Susan's husband, Mr. Maddox. This evening he ordered me out of his cottage, though my aunt begged him to let me stay."

"Why should he deal so harshly with you?" asked Mr. Hastings, in some surprise.

"Because my inability to get work prevented me from earning the money he looked for."

Bob further explained the character of the man he had been living with since he came to Factoryville, and told Mr. Hastings how sorry he was that his Aunt Susan was bound for life to such a disreputable person.

"It is certainly a very sad case, but I do not think hers is the only example of the kind in Factoryville. Now, Robert, I should not feel easy unless I did something for you. You must let me testify my gratitude in some substantial way. You are rather young to embark upon the world on your own resources. Let me give you a nominal situation on my grounds here, say as assistant to my gardener, and then when the High School opens in town you shall attend it. You will continue to live on these premises, and attend to such odd jobs as your time will permit of. What do you say?"

Bob was delighted with this proposal, and eagerly accepted it, much to the satisfaction of Mr. Hastings; but unfortunately for Bob events soon transpired which broke up this pleasing arrangement.

However, at that moment the boy had no idea of what fate held in store for him, and consequently he was overjoyed at the good luck which had now fallen to his lot.

As soon as he was dressed Mr. Hastings took him downstairs and presented him to his wife and daughter Myrtle.

who both praised his bravery and presence of mind in warm terms, and fittingly expressed the gratitude they felt toward him for saving the life of their little Edith.

Bob dined with the family that evening, and proved himself a very bright and entertaining guest.

He was assigned to a neat spare room in the loft over the stable and carriage-house where the coachman and footman slept, and next morning was put in the gardener's charge.

That afternoon Mr. Hastings sent out to him an excellent working suit, and a fine best suit, together with an ample supply of underwear, and such other things as he would naturally require.

Bob found his new position in life very satisfactory.

The family treated him with every consideration, and both Myrtle and Edith looked on him more as a friend than an employee of the house.

He took the girls out rowing nearly every evening before dinner, sometimes going quite a distance either up or down the river, and Mrs. Hastings, in spite of her recent scare, felt no uneasiness about her daughters as long as she knew they were in Bob's care.

In addition to the outfit of clothes and other necessary articles furnished the boy by Mr. Hastings, he was also the recipient of an elegant little gold watch and chain presented by Mrs. Hastings, and two handsome and valuable scarf-pins from Edith and Myrtle respectively.

"It's better to be born lucky than rich," grinned Bob to himself, a week after he had been installed in the Hastings' household. "If I haven't landed in Easy street it must be next door to it."

He had never been so happy and contented before in his young life, and it was just as well he couldn't look ahead and see what was before him.

CHAPTER IV.

BOB OVERHEARS A PLOT.

Bob had been a week at the Hastings' home when he decided he would pay a visit to his Aunt Susan, and let her know about his good luck.

He was sure the news would please her very much indeed.

Of course, he had some misgivings about meeting Mr. Maddox, lest that individual should endeavor to make things hot for him if he caught him at his cottage; but as he was no longer a member of the Maddox household he did not see that his aunt's husband had any right to interfere with him under the altered circumstances.

He chose his hour for calling soon after dark, when Mr. Maddox was accustomed to go to a neighboring saloon to pass some time in the society of congenial spirits.

As he approached the cottage whose roof had sheltered him for the last two years he saw Mr. Maddox come out of the door, walk down the road a short distance, and then turn up a side street.

The nearest saloon was two blocks away in that direc-

tion, and so Bob was satisfied the coast would be clear for a couple of hours at least.

He advanced boldly up the little yard to the kitchen door and knocked.

Mrs. Maddox answered the summons and was both surprised and delighted to see Bob standing there on the step.

She drew him inside, kissed him, and after bolting the door, led him into the meagerly-furnished sitting-room.

"Mr. Maddox has been like a bear ever since you went away," said the patient little woman, putting the corner of her apron to her eyes. "He is very angry with you, and swears that if he ever meets you again he will half-kill you."

"It wouldn't be healthy for him to touch me now, I can tell you that, Aunt Sue. I've got friends who would make it pretty hot for him if he laid his hands on me."

"Why, Bob, what do you mean? Tell me what has occurred since you left us a week ago."

"That's what I came here for, auntie. You will be surprised to learn that I am now living about a mile from here, on the river road, at the home of Mr. Warren Hastings, president of the Empire State Woollen Mills."

"Is that possible!" exclaimed his aunt, in great astonishment.

"Yes, auntie; and this is how it happened."

Whereupon Bob gave his only relative a faithful account of his adventure that night on the river which led up to the establishment of such satisfactory relations between himself and the Hastings family.

"I am so glad you have been so fortunate, Bob," said Mrs. Maddox, in a tone which left no doubt as to the sincerity of her words. "I have been very much worried about you since Mr. Maddox forced you to leave the cottage, but now I shall be quite easy in my mind as to your present and future. The only thing that troubles me is that Mr. Maddox, as soon as he learns how fortunately you are situated, may take it into his head to annoy you unless you give him some money."

"I wouldn't advise him to do so. Whatever money I may have to give away shall come to you, Aunt Sue, for you need it badly, and I hope you won't allow Mr. Maddox to bulldoze you out of any of it to spend at the saloon."

"I shall never tell him that I have any," she replied, firmly.

"You will find it hard to close his eyes to that fact. He will want to know how you supply the house when he hasn't given you anything."

"His curiosity will have to go unsatisfied."

"I'm afraid that will only lead to trouble, for you know what Mr. Maddox is when aroused. Tell him I sent it to you, but don't give up a cent if you can avoid it in any way."

"I will do as you say."

"Then here is a \$5 bill to commence with," said Bob, forcing it into her hand.

"You are a dear, good boy, Bob," said his aunt grate-

fully, throwing her arms around his neck and hugging him.

At that moment the knob of the kitchen door was rattled violently, and then several heavy thumps came upon it.

"My gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Maddox, all of a tremble. "That is my husband. He mustn't find you here. I don't know what brought him back so soon."

"Maybe he wants something and will go away again."

"Then you had better get into that closet, and I will try and get him out again as soon as I can."

"All right, auntie," replied the boy, retreating to the closet in question.

The thumping on the kitchen door was repeated with more persistence and vigor, showing that Mr. Maddox was evidently growing impatient at the delay.

"Why didn't yer let me in at once?" demanded Mr. Maddox, when his wife opened the door.

"I came as soon as I could," replied the little woman, with a look of uneasiness when she found that her husband was accompanied with a visitor.

"Then go upstairs and go to bed," growled the boss of the cottage in a surly tone, pushing her ahead of him.

"But I am not through with my work yet," she protested.

"Whether you're through or not I don't want yer around—d'ye understand?" he said, in a threatening tone.

Mrs. Maddox was clearly alarmed at the situation.

Evidently her husband had no intention of leaving the cottage for some little time, and she trembled for the safety of Bob.

How to get the boy out of the house without her husband's knowledge was a serious problem to her.

"Well, why don't yer go when I tell you?" roared Mr. Maddox, more ugly than ever.

"I'm going," she answered meekly.

"Then go," he said, roughly, as they entered the sitting-room, giving her a rude push toward the little hallway.

"If I ketch yer listenin' to what we're sayin' down here I'll be the death of yer," he snarled, slamming the door in her face. "That's what a feller is up agin when he's tied to a female," he growled to his companion. "Take a seat, Jim, and make yerself comfortable. I'll make some hot water, and we'll have a toddy," he added, taking a black bottle and placing it upon the table.

Then he went into the kitchen, filled the tea kettle, and put it on the stove to boil, adding some chips of wood to the almost extinguished coals, and fanning them into a blaze.

While the water was heating he got a couple of tumblers and the sugar bowl.

"You have a cosy place here, Bill," remarked his companion, looking around the room whose only virtue was extreme cleanliness.

"Cosy be jiggered. It would be all right if I had the money to fit it up like it used to be. That's the fault of

them accursed sharks that are always takin' the bread out of the workin' people's mouths."

"Ain't that what I always said, Bill?" said his associate, complacently.

"Sure yer have. We might have won that strike six years ago if the fools hadn't give in to the bosses. Well, what did they get by it? Ain't they had to strike agin? Now they can't go back, 'cause the bosses have locked 'em out. Serve 'em right for a parcel of mealy-mouthed donkeys."

"So say I. You and me ain't got no cause to kick ourselves. We didn't go back to work at starvation wages."

"I should think not. Ketch me workin' for such wages."

Mr. Maddox's tone seemed to indicate virtuous indignation.

In a moment or two he went into the kitchen and returned with the steaming kettle.

Then he poured out a liberal allowance of liquor into each glass, added some hot water and sugar, and stirred the compound.

"Here's lookin' at yer, Bill," said Jim, crooking his elbow.

"Same to you, Jim Rolfe," answered Mr. Maddox, swallowing the contents of his glass.

"Now let's get down to bus'ness," said Rolfe.

"Wait a moment."

Maddox tiptoed to the hall door and swung it suddenly open, but he was disappointed if he had expected to surprise his wife outside.

She wasn't there, but leaning over the balusters above in a tremble of apprehension for Bob.

With a grunt of satisfaction, Mr. Maddox shut the door again, returned to his companion, and proceeded to mix another dose of whisky and hot water.

"Go ahead. I'll listen to you," he said, as he took up the bottle.

"Yer see, somethin' has got to be done to scare the bosses of the factories. The buildin's themselves are too well guarded for the committee to take any chances. So it's been arranged to destroy some of them fine residences down the road."

"Well," said Mr. Maddox, pushing the second whisky toward his companion, "how is it to be done, and who's goin' to take the risk a-doin' it?"

"It kin be done easy enough," nodded Rolfe, taking a gulp of liquor.

"How?"

Rolfe winked one eye sagaciously.

"I'll tell yer if yer agree to stand in with me and help," he said.

"Me help! What for?"

"For the good of the cause," grinned Rolfe.

"Blow the cause! What do I care about it, anyway? I ain't been shut out. The cause didn't do me any good six years ago when I lost my job."

"But if there's money in it, too?" suggested his companion, with another wink.

"Money!" exclaimed Mr. Maddox, with a look of interest. "Now ye're talkin'. Is there any money in it?"

"There is."

"How much?"

"Three hundred dollars if we burn down the Hastings' house to begin with."

"Three hundred dollars!" cried Maddox, his lips working greedily.

"Three hundred dollars," repeated Rolfe.

"Who's goin' to pay it?"

"The committee."

"What committee?"

"Oh, a certain committee, of course."

"You're sure of that?"

"Dead sure."

"How do you know that?"

"I'm on the inside, and I know all about the matter. It's on the quiet, as a matter of course. It wouldn't do for such a thing as this to leak out among the people, 'cause we don't know who might turn traitor for the sake of makin' somethin' by warnin' the bosses."

"That's right," nodded Maddox.

"I promised to see to it that the good work is started. I can't do it alone, so as you're an old chum of mine I selected you. I believe I kin trust yer."

"Of course you kin."

"I know \$150 would come handy to you."

"Bet yer life it would. I ain't seen that much money in years."

"Then you'll go in with me?"

"I will, if it's safe."

"It's as safe as anythin' can be."

"Well, let's hear the partic'lars," said Mr. Maddox, starting to mix the third hot whisky.

CHAPTER V.

MR. MADDOX AND HIS FRIEND ROLFE FIND THEMSELVES IN HOT WATER.

"Ever since the scheme of gettin' back at some of these money-bags was brought up and figgered on by the committee I've been hangin' around them fine houses tryin' to see how the game could be worked, for I wanted to get my flukes on that there money myself."

Maddox nodded and sipped his toddy.

"I've got into the grounds one way or another. Once on a grocery waggin, agin on a waggin that fetched some cases of champagne—any old way, in fact, that I could. I kept my weather eye liftin', you kin believe, when I got there, and I've discovered how we kin get into the cellar of two or three of the houses. The Hastings' cellar is the easiest of the lot, for it's got a big winder that ought to be as easy as piecrust to force."

"S'pose it's bolted and barred from the inside—how are yer goin' to force it?" asked Mr. Maddox, finishing his glass and pouring out a fourth dram.

"There's a door down a flight of stone steps if the winder gives us trouble," said Rolfe. "I've got the tools that'll make it open as slick as a whistle."

"Well, if we get in what then?"

"What then? Why, we'll start a nice little fire that'll soon spread all over the cellar, and after it gets good head-way the house will go up like a tinder-box."

"But them cellars are stone, ain't they?"

"What of it? The roofs are wood, and the Hastings' cellar I know is full of boxes and barrels that'll burn first-class. They keep a tank of kerosene down there, too. We can drew off the oil and soak the stuff well with it, then a match and some paper will do the rest. We couldn't make \$300 easier if we tried."

"And I get half of that," said Maddox, smacking his lips at the mention of the money.

"Of course you get half."

"It looks rather risky. S'pose we wuz to get caught?"

"We mustn't suppose any such thing. If we go to work about the matter right we won't get caught."

Mr. Maddox, however, had his doubts, though they were rather weakened by the whisky he had drunk, which had also instilled a false kind of courage into his veins.

Jim Rolfe was a specious talker, and he easily met every argument advanced by his associate, and went several points better, so that he finally convinced Maddox, who was hot after the \$150, that they had an open-and-shut game before them.

It was ten o'clock by the time the two rascals finally came to an agreement to carry out their plans that night some time after midnight.

And during it all Bob Ford stood like a statue in the closet, an interested listener to the plot and all the details thereof.

The disclosure had certainly startled him very much more especially as Mr. Maddox was connected with it. He had long recognized the fact that his aunt's husband was a worthless and disagreeable man, but he had had no idea that he was a rascal at heart.

Now that the truth was out he felt a great sympathy in his heart for Aunt Sue; as well as an intense indignation against Mr. Maddox.

"It's a good thing that I came here to-night," he thought. "Those rascals have certainly laid their plans well, and they might have succeeded had their scheme not come to my ears. As it is I'll see that they get it where the chicken got the ax. I fancy they'll cool their heels in jail for some months for this outrage."

Maddox and his friend Rolfe being now of one mind on the project of burning down the home of Warren Hastings that night, they finished the whisky, which seemed to have no more effect on them than so much water, put on their hats, and prepared to leave the house.

Maddox was to accompany Rolfe home so that the latter could get the tools he needed for the enterprise; then they were to make their way at their leisure to the scene of operations, and put the scheme into force some time after

midnight, at which hour they judged the coast would be clear for them to work without discovery.

As soon as the two men left the house, Bob came out of the closet.

"I mustn't breathe a word of what I overheard to Aunt Sue," he said to himself. "When Mr. Maddox is provided for by the authorities she'll be able to get along in much better shape than she has these six years back. She will probably have to move to another town on account of the disgrace of the affair, but on the whole it is worth all that to be well rid of such a man."

Mrs. Maddox, who had been waiting and watching upstairs for her husband and his companion to leave the house—with her heart in her mouth lest some incautious movement on Bob's part should betray his presence in the closet—hastened down as soon as she heard the kitchen door bang.

"Oh, Bob!" she exclaimed, when she entered the sitting-room and saw the boy seated in the chair recently vacated by Mr. Maddox. "How ever did you manage to stand it so long in that closet. They were in the house over two hours. I was in constant fear that my husband might discover your presence."

"I stood it all right, Aunt Sue. As Mr. Maddox seemed to have no occasion to go to the closet, why, I was in no particular danger of discovery."

"Thank heaven that it turned out so well," she said, fervently.

Bob only stayed a few minutes longer at the cottage, as he was anxious to get back and tell Mr. Hastings what was on the tapis.

On reaching the house, however, he found only the gardener stirring around the premises.

The family had retired for the night, as had also the servants.

The gardener told him that Mr. Hastings had received a telegram from New York, and had taken a late train for the metropolis.

"That's too bad," said Bob, scratching his head.

"Too bad! Why, what do you mean?" asked the surprised gardener.

"The fact is he ought to be here to-night. An attempt is going to be made to burn this house."

"Burn this house!" gasped the man.

"Yes. I overheard the whole plot."

"My gracious! Tell me about it."

Bob, without mentioning names or stating where he had been concealed, gave the facts as he knew them to the gardener.

"This looks like a serious piece of business," said the man.

"It is serious."

"Then the police must be notified. There is a telephone in Mr. Hastings' library."

"I think you, I, the coachman, and the footman can manage these rascals without calling in the police."

"I don't know about that," replied the gardener, doubt-

fully. "They must be desperate fellows to undertake such a thing as incendiarism merely to gratify their hatred for Mr. Hastings."

"They're to receive \$300 from some committee."

"Are you sure of that?" asked the amazed gardener.

"That's the bait one of them used to persuade the other to go in with him."

"And do you think there is any truth in it?"

"I have very little doubt about it."

"And those two men are coming here to-night?"

"They are."

"At what time?"

"Between twelve and one."

"We had better call up the police."

"No. I have an idea. I'll call the coachman and footman. They have revolvers?"

"Yes. I have a revolver, too."

"So much the better. Now, my plan is this: You three will conceal yourselves in the cellar, in readiness to rush upon them when I give the signal. We'll leave the cellar window unfastened so they can get inside. My idea is to catch them in the act of setting the place on fire. I'll have the hose in readiness for instant action. I'm going to attach it to the hot-water boiler in the washroom, which is right over the window. At the right moment I'll let them have a dose of the scalding stuff. That will throw them into confusion. Then you three can rush out and secure them before they can recover themselves."

"That's a fine idea," grinned the gardener. "It will be just the thing. Give them a good scalding while you're about it. It will be a lesson to them, and the police will attend to their case afterward."

Bob and the gardener went to the coach-house and stable, awoke the coachman and footman, who slept in rooms adjoining Bob's, and they were soon in possession of all the particulars of the plot to burn the mansion and the boy's scheme to outwit them.

Both of the men were tickled with Bob's plan, and immediately agreed to do their part to put it into successful execution.

One end was attached to the boiler in the washroom, and the rest of it was coiled inside under the window, so that all Bob had to do was to get in at the window, which was left unlocked, throw out the hose, turn on the hot water, dash open the cellar window, and play upon the rascals.

By the time these arrangements had been made it was close on to midnight.

"Get down into the cellar now, unfasten the window, and hide yourselves. I'll keep out of sight and watch for the coming of those scamps," said Bob.

Accordingly the three men let themselves into the cellar through the door, and Bob took up a commanding position in the shadow of the carriage-house.

It was a gloomy night, the sky being overcast and threatening rain.

These conditions were favorable for the plan of Maddox and Rolfe, and had without doubt been duly considered

by the rascals when they selected that night for their operations.

An hour passed away on leaden wings, and Bob was beginning to wonder whether Maddox and his pal had given up their scheme for that night, when two shadows suddenly appeared in the yard.

"They're here at last," muttered the boy, his nerves beginning to tingle with excitement.

The shadows advanced noiselessly toward the cellar window, the location of which Rolfe had made himself acquainted with.

The rascals came to a pause before it; Rolfe knelt down and tried it.

He uttered an exclamation of satisfaction when he found that it was not fastened.

This ought to have struck him as rather a suspicious circumstance, or an instance of gross carelessness on the part of the servants.

However, neither of the rascals stopped to consider the matter at all, so eager were they to get inside.

Bob saw them both disappear within, and close the window after themselves.

After waiting a few minutes to give them time to look around and get started on their crooked game, Bob ran lightly over to the window, pulled it open a trifle, and looked down into the cellar.

Rolfe and Maddox, now disguised by masks, had lighted a candle, and were moving around the place, examining the interior.

The boy began to fear that they might discover the presence of the gardener and his two companions.

In order to be prepared for emergencies, he brought a short ladder under the washroom window, mounted it, threw up the window softly, got inside, and lowered the hose outside.

Then he took another peek at the rascals.

Maddox was piling paper around a pair of empty flour barrels, not far from the window, while Rolfe was drawing a quart measure of oil from the metal tank containing the kerosene.

Rolfe poured the oil over the paper and barrels, and then refilled the can.

He distributed the oil over all the wooden boxes, and other inflammable material in the cellar.

All being in readiness, the rascal knelt down, and with the candle flame lighted the paper, which at once burst into a ruddy flame, throwing out a considerable quantity of smoke.

As the tiny jets of fire began to creep up the outside barrel Bob concluded it was high time for him to act.

He dashed up the ladder into the washroom, turned on the boiling water, and then hurried back to the cellar window.

Throwing it open with a whoop that would have put an Indian to shame, he stepped in on a packing case which stood under it, and dragged the nozzle of the hose after him.

The masked men were taken completely by surprise when Bob Ford suddenly appeared at the window and turned a jet of boiling hot water full upon them, peppering them and the fire they had started with equal impartiality.

Maddox turned his head away, and threw up his arms to ward off the pitiless shower, while Rolfe fell forward on his hands and knees, completely dazed by the scalding spray.

While they were thus thrown into complete confusion, the gardener and his companions issued from the places of concealment and dashed upon them.

Their capture was so easy as to be almost ludicrous, and while the men were tying their discomfited prisoners, Bob, by a well-directed stream, soon put the fire out altogether.

CHAPTER VI.

ABDUCTED.

By the time the fire was out the hose had become a pretty hard proposition for Bob to handle, as the boiling water passing through had heated it almost red hot, so the boy was mighty glad to drop it, scurry up the ladder, and turn off the flow at the boiler.

When he came down the ladder, after closing the window, he found the gardener and his companions had marched the two rascals up out of the cellar.

Their arms were tightly bound behind their backs, their masks were off, and they looked the picture of hard luck.

Maddox had not yet recognized Bob, as his senses had been in such a state of confusion and dismay at the unexpected conclusion of the enterprise in which he was engaged; but when the coachman brought a lantern and held it up so that the faces of the whole party were more or less illuminated, the shiftless husband of Mrs. Sue Maddox uttered an exclamation of dismay as his eyes rested on the face of the boy he had thrown out upon the world a week previous.

"I see you know me, Mr. Maddox," said Bob, in a cold tone. "I am sorry to see you engaged in an affair that is likely to land you in the State prison for many years."

"What are you doing here?" cried the rascal in an ugly voice.

"Considering that I belong on these premises, there is nothing surprising in the fact that you see me here."

"What do you mean by that?" snarled Maddox.

"I mean that I'm one of Mr. Hastings' employees."

Maddox uttered an oath and was then silent.

"You'd better harness one of the horses to the light wagon, William," said Bob to the coachman. "We'll take our prisoners to the police station at once."

"All right," replied William. "I think that is the proper thing to do."

So he and the footman proceeded to get the team ready, while Bob and the gardener stood guard over Maddox and Rolfe.

In ten minutes the entire party started for the town. They didn't take the River road, but the street above.

It was half-past one in the morning, and there was a slight drizzle in the air.

There were no lights along the street until they struck the town proper, then the gleam of the gas-lamps threw a fitful, watery look around at half-block intervals.

Not a solitary pedestrian was met until they got well into Factoryville, and within a few blocks of the station.

Finally the red and green lamp that glowed above police headquarters came into sight, and they drove up to the door and stopped.

The prisoners were yanked out of the wagon with very little ceremony, and marched into the station, where they were handed over to the police on the charge of incendiarism.

Bob and the others told their stories, promised to appear next day at the examination in the magistrate's court, and then drove back home, while the prisoners were locked up for the night in cells below the sidewalk.

The morning newspapers had an account of the affair, and when the prisoners were called to the bar at ten o'clock the court was jammed with spectators, the strikers of the mills predominating.

On the evidence given by Bob and his fellow employees in the Hastings' service Mr. Maddox and his pal Rolfe were held for trial.

After the proceedings were over, Bob called on his Aunt Sue, told her the whole story of her husband's rascality, and sympathized with her the best he could.

"I don't blame you, Bob," she sobbed. "But it's dreadful to think that William is in jail on so serious a charge, which will probably send him to the penitentiary."

"I really don't see how you could cling to such a man for so many years, Aunt Sue. You did everything a true and honest wife could do for a man, and I don't believe he appreciated your kindness in the least. For my part, now that he is in prison I think it is about time that you called a halt. You must get away from Factoryville, and start a new life somewhere else. I will help you all I can."

"You are a good boy, Bob. I know you are advising me for the best, but William is my husband, and I cannot —"

She burst into tears and sobbed pathetically.

Bob did all he could to comfort her, and soon afterward took his leave.

When Mr. Hastings returned from New York he was much astonished to learn about the bold attempt made to destroy his house.

He thanked Bob and his allies of that night for the service they had rendered him, and at the boy's earnest request he promised to assist Mrs. Maddox.

As a further evidence of his gratitude he presented the brave boy with a check for \$500, which Bob placed to his credit in a savings bank, and he gave each of his other three employees \$100 each.

Mr. Hastings publicly announced his intention of prose-

cuting to the full extent of the law the two rascals who had tried to burn his house.

He also became very active in probing the complicity of the committee, whom Bob's evidence implicated in the affair.

The committee being thus personally interested in the outcome of the trial of Maddox and Rolfe, which was set down for the first week in September, decided to secretly assist the two men.

So they hired lawyers in a roundabout way, and privately voted funds for the defense of the prisoners.

As Bob Ford was the principal witness for the prosecution, the committee resolved that the boy must be spirited out of the neighborhood before the trial.

Two men were selected to carry out this purpose.

They were sworn to secrecy, and promised \$500 each if they successfully accomplished this design.

With the persistency of the redskin of old following a trail, these two men kept a keen eye on Bob's movements, ever on the alert for a favorable opportunity to carry out the mandate of the organization.

The boy, of course, was unaware that he was being watched, and therefore adopted no unusual precautions for his own safety.

Circumstances, however, befriended him in a variety of ways, and prevented the carrying out of the plot against him until within a week of the trial.

One evening a man appeared on the Hastings' grounds and asked to see Bob.

The boy was hunted up and notified about the visitor.

The man was standing just inside of the gate opening on the back street.

Bob didn't recognize him, and asked what he wanted.

"Mrs. Maddox has met with a serious accident, and she sent me out here to bring you to her.

"What kind of an accident?" asked the boy, in great concern.

"Well, her clothes caught fire at the stove this evenin' when she was cookin' her supper, and if it hadn't been that I was just passin' the house she might have been burned to death," replied the man glibly.

Bob believed his story and said he would accompany him to his aunt's cottage.

He left word where he was going, and the cause that called him away, and then started off with the man.

They had proceeded perhaps a quarter of a mile along the street, which was always lonesome in that neighborhood after nightfall, when another man approached them and asked for a match.

Bob's companion said he had none, and turned to the boy.

As Bob began to search his pockets for a lucifer he was suddenly seized and overthrown by the two men.

A gag was thrust into his mouth, and his arms bound behind his back.

A light wagon which had been standing at the junction of a side street was now driven up by one of the men.

There was a long covered box in it.

Bob was lifted into the wagon, the cover of the box was taken off, the boy deposited inside, and the cover, which was perforated with a dozen auger holes, was replaced and screwed down by four screws.

Then the wagon was driven up the street in a direction which would take it away from Factoryville.

CHAPTER VII.

DOWN THE RIVER.

The wagon kept steadily along the road for several hours, the driver and his companion talking earnestly together, and occasionally filling their pipes and smoking.

It was after eleven o'clock when they entered the outskirts of a good-sized town, located, like Factoryville, on the river.

The men drove down to one of the wharves, at that hour silent and deserted, at the end of which lay a small schooner loaded with shingles.

Her hold was quite full, and bundles of the shingles were stacked in a double row on either side of her deck.

The stops were off her sails, and the upper booms raised a foot or two, showing that she was on the eve of sailing.

In fact, her captain and owner was only waiting for the flood tide to get under way down the river.

The wagon was evidently expected, for a couple of men stepped ashore and approached the vehicle to lend a hand in getting the box on board the schooner.

The driver and his companion, however, took the job upon themselves of transferring the box to the vessel, and placing it on deck between the two masts where they were directed to put it.

Flasks of liquor were produced by the men who came with the box, and all hands drank in turn until the contents of the flasks were exhausted.

About this time the captain came on deck and had a short conversation with one of the newcomers, who finally passed him a \$50 bill.

The master of the schooner then looked over the vessel's side, and announced that it was time to get under way.

The driver of the light wagon, after a brief talk with his companion, went ashore, mounted to the seat and drove away, while the other man sat down on the lid of the box, took out his pipe and began to smoke.

The crew of the schooner hoisted the sails, cast loose from the wharf, and presently under a light breeze the craft was moving down the river.

In a short time two of the three men composing the crew went below, the third remaining at the helm.

The man in charge of the box then unscrewed the cover, and took a look at his prisoner.

He found Bob unconscious, and removed the gag from his mouth so he could get more air.

It was an hour or more before the boy recovered his senses.

As he lay in his narrow quarters, gazing up at the starry

heaven, he wondered where he was and what had happened to him.

At length he remembered how he had been assaulted and made a prisoner by two men he never remembered having seen before in his life.

He had an indistinct recollection of being driven off in a wagon after the men had placed him in the box, and now as his eyes rested on the broad sail above his head, felt the motion of the vessel, and heard the faint hum of the wind on the sail, he knew he was on a fore-and-aft craft of some kind which was bearing him either up or down the river.

Presently the face of the guardian of the box looked down at him.

"So you've come to your senses, have you?" said a gruff voice.

Bob studied the man's features in the darkness as well as he could before he opened his mouth, and was satisfied this was the man who had called at the Hastings' place and told him, what was evidently a false story, that his aunt had met with an accident, and had sent him to bring him to her.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" the boy asked at length.

The man blew a whiff of smoke from his lips, and made no reply.

"What are you going to do with me?"

"I'm not going to hurt you if you remain quiet."

"Where are you taking me?"

"Down the river."

"What for?"

"Because you're not wanted in Factoryville any longer."

As Bob saw no reason why anyone should object to his remaining in Factoryville this reply rather astonished him.

"I don't understand you," replied Bob. "And I don't understand why I have been so roughly handled."

It doesn't make any difference to me whether you understand it or not."

"I can't see what you or anybody else is going to gain by carrying me off in this way," said the puzzled boy.

"Then I advise you not to bother your head about it," growled the man.

"But I want to know what it all means," persisted Bob.

"I'll never tell you. I'm only carrying out my orders."

"And what are your orders?"

"To take you down the river and see that you don't get back to Factoryville in a hurry."

"Who gave you those orders?"

"Say, young feller, you want to know altogether too much."

"You won't tell me, then?"

"No, I won't."

"But you haven't told me where you are taking me," said Bob, after a pause.

"I told you down the river."

"Whereabouts down the river?"

"You'll learn when you get there."

"You're taking me to New York, aren't you?"

"Mebbe I am."

"I believe you are. What are you going to do with me when you reach the city?"

"You'll find that out in good time."

"That isn't very satisfactory."

"It's all the satisfaction I can give you."

"You won't tell me why I have been carried away from Factoryville?"

"No, I won't."

"Well, I think this is a great outrage."

"You can think what you please. This is a free country," chuckled the man.

Bob saw there wasn't any information to be gotten out of the man who had assisted in his capture, and was now evidently in charge of him, so he said nothing more.

At that moment eight bells were sounded.

"Do you want me to gag you again?" asked the man, leaning down and speaking in a hoarse whisper.

"No," replied the boy.

"Will you promise not to make any disturbance while the helm is being relieved?"

"I promise," replied Bob, seeing there was no help for it.

"All right. I'll take your word," said the man.

He took up the cover of the box, and placed it in position on top of the box, shutting the boy in again.

Then he took his seat on top of it once more and waited.

A sailor came out of the forecastle, exchanged a word with him as he passed, and went to the wheel.

The man who had been at the helm since the schooner left her wharf at midnight passed him in the other direction going forward to turn in.

The fellow in charge of the box then lifted off the cover again.

"Now you can swallow all the air you want till four bells—that is six o'clock. It will be daylight then, and I'll have to screw you up once more till I get you ashore."

Bob, however, lulled by the splash of the river against the schooner's sides, fell asleep in half an hour, and when he came to his senses again the cover was on the box, and the light of morning was filtering through the auger holes.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW YORK DEN.

There was now a heavier slant of wind on, and the schooner was making better speed down the river.

She was so heavily loaded that she leaned only slightly to the breeze.

Bob was presently aware that his arms were free, and that a small package of something lay on his chest.

Curiosity induced him to investigate its contents, and he found it contained two meat sandwiches and a flask full of water.

The flask, however, smelled abominably of whisky.

The guardian of the box evidently heard him stirring,

for Bob saw a shadow fall across several of the holes in the lid and a voice came down to him.

"You're awake, are you?"

"Yes," replied the boy.

"See that you keep quiet then, and nothin' 'll happen to you," said the voice.

Then the shadow was lifted, which showed Bob that the man had drawn back again.

An hour or two passed very monotonously to the boy, who employed the time in trying to conjecture the reason for his abduction from Factoryville.

Finally he arrived at the conclusion that some friends of Maddox and Rolfe had taken this means to remove the most important witness for the prosecution.

"I don't see that it will save them from conviction, as there are three other eye-witnesses to their attempted crime," he mused.

Bob didn't quite hit the mark, but came as near it as he could reasonably be expected, since he was entirely unaware that the evidence he was expected to furnish against the secret committee was the true cause of his present unfortunate situation.

By and by he felt hungry and thirsty, and then he ate the sandwiches and drank the water.

After that he felt better, and began to look upon his situation in a more philosophical light.

The schooner arrived within sight of Manhattan Island about noon.

Another hour or more was consumed in sailing down the west shore of the island, rounding the Battery, and working her way up the East River to the wharf which she was to make fast to.

It was about three o'clock when Bob felt the box in which he was confined lifted with some care and carried from the schooner to the dock, where it was loaded on an express wagon.

The vehicle started off at once, turned into South street, and was driven for some distance with several turnings until it came to a halt in an obscure neighborhood that was not regarded with much respect by the police.

The box was lifted out of the wagon and carried under a low archway, with a strong-smelling grog-shop on one side, and a still more odorant old clothes' shop on the other.

Up the brick-paved and filthy lane, turning now to the right and then to the left, the box was conveyed until the bearers reached an old half-dilapidated house, through the doorless entrance of which they passed and took their way down a long, reeking hallway until they arrived at a closed door.

The guardian of the box, who was in front, knocked in a peculiar way on the resonant panel, and after a delay of some minutes the door was unbarred, unlocked, and thrown open.

A cadaverous, hollow-eyed, and unshaven man of sinister aspect received them, and motioned to a spot on the floor for them to lay down the box.

"I thought yer'd given up yer plan," he grinned, when the door closed behind the expressman, and he had secured it once more against the intrusion of unwelcome visitors. "Yer were so long puttin' it into execution."

"Last night was the first chance we got for puttin' our hooks onto the kid," explained the man who had charge of the box.

"Better late than never, Weaver," replied the sardonic grin. "Help yerself to a drink," and he pointed to a bottle which stood on the dirty table.

The man addressed as Weaver did not require a second invitation to make free with the villainous compound which went by the name of whisky in that locality.

"I'll let the boy out now," he said, smacking his lips over the dram. "He's a stout young fellow, and I've taken the cords off his arms that we bound him with at first, but I guess we can handle him all right if he tries to cut up any didos."

"This will settle him if he acts ugly," said the cadaverous man, pulling a slungshot out of his hip pocket. "Now yer kin take off the lid."

Weaver unscrewed the cover and threw it off.

"You can get out now, young feller, and stretch yerself, but I warn you not to get too gay or somethin' might happen you wouldn't like."

Bob took advantage of this permission to get out of the box and look around.

He found himself in a small, dirty, and sparsely furnished room, the only window of which looked out on a miserable narrow space which could not possibly be called either a yard nor an alley, and was closed in by the walls of adjacent buildings whose height shut out every vestige of sunlight, and only admitted a kind of twilight at mid-day.

The squalor and misery of one of the lowest districts of New York City was everywhere apparent on the outside.

Through an open window opposite Bob caught a momentary glimpse of several low-browed, sullen, dirty men, and bleary-eyed, pallid women, while on a narrow fire-escape above he saw three half-naked children engaged in a scrap.

Then he turned and looked at the cadaverous scamp who presided over the room to which he had been brought, and the look of cunning and crime which was stamped on his hard features did not tend to reassure the boy.

"Yer'll know me when yer seen me agin, I s'pose," grinned the rascal, as he observed the penetrating look of the boy. "Since yer have come here to lodge for awhile I daresay yer would like to see yer bedroom, eh?"

This ghastly bit of humor seemed to afford the two men much enjoyment, for they chuckled over it with much zest before the cadaverous man walked over to a door in the wall and threw it open.

"There's yer chamber. If it ain't so swell as what yer'd find at the Waldorf-Astoria, it's better'n some places I know of. Come here and look at it."

"I'm not curious to inspect it," said Bob, shortly.

"Oh, yer ain't, eh? Think it ain't good enough for yer! Been used to better!" snarled the cadaverous rascal. "If you try to put on any airs with me I'll twist yer neck for yer—d'ye understand?"

He spoke so savagely that Bob experienced a shiver of dread for the future.

"Now get in there, and stay there till I let yer out," continued the fellow, with an oath, seizing the boy by the arm, and pushing him forward into the dark hole, which was not much larger than a good-sized closet.

Bob heard a key turned in the lock after the door had closed behind him, and he knew he was a prisoner in the place.

He pulled his match-safe from his pocket, and cautiously struck a light in order to discover what sort of place he was in.

It was a box-like room about four feet by six.

The walls, ceiling and floor were black with grime.

A dirty mattress and filthy blanket occupied the greater part of the floor space.

There was also a rickety stool on which stood a candlestick with a bit of candle stuck in it, and covered with grease and blue mold.

The confined atmosphere reeked with a combination of vile odors such as the boy had never smelt before, and which almost turned his stomach.

The match expired in his fingers, leaving him once more in the dark.

He could hear the two men talking together in the other room, and he put his ear to a crack in the door and tried to make out what they were saying.

They spoke too low, however, for him to distinguish more than a word here and there.

He could see them as they sat about the table helping themselves to the contents of the bottle.

Finally the man who had brought the box pulled a couple of bills from his vest pocket, and handed them to the cadaverous ruffian.

The fellow received them with a grunt of satisfaction, and stowed them away somewhere in his clothes.

Then the men got up, put on their hats, and after the occupant of the premises had unbarred the door, they went out together.

CHAPTER IX.

SENT TO SEA.

"I wonder what's going to be the end of this thing?" Bob asked himself, as he removed the candlestick and seated himself on the stool. "I don't think I could be in a much worse scrape. I have been brought to some low den, in a vile neighborhood of New York, for a purpose. Now, what can that purpose be?"

Bob racked his brains in vain for a plausible answer to that question, but he could not think of a satisfactory one.

An hour elapsed before the cadaverous man returned.

He brought a package of coarse food with him which he placed on the table.

Then he took a cracked jug and went to a faucet in the space between the buildings and filled it with water.

Placing it beside the food, he unlocked the door of the small room, and let Bob out.

"Yer hungry, I s'pose," he said. "Sit up to that table and eat what yer see."

Bob was both hungry and thirsty, and he availed himself of this chance to get rid of both of those sensations.

The cadaverous man lit his pipe, sat down on the second chair, and eyed the boy while he consumed the food.

"How would yer like to go to sea?" he asked Bob, after an interval of silence.

"I'm not anxious to go," replied the boy.

"Ain't yer? It's the best thing yer could do," said the man, with a grin.

"I'd much rather go back to Factoryville. Perhaps you know why I was carried off from there?" said Bob, giving his jailer a sharp glance.

"Mebbe I do," answered the ruffian, with a stolid look.

"Then I wish you'd tell me."

"Yer wuz carried off because you know'd too much."

"Because I was the chief witness against Maddox and Rolfe, charged with incendiarism, I suppose you mean?"

"I don't know nothin' about that. All I know is that yer dangerous to certain parties up the river, and ver had to be got out'r the way."

"And I'm to be kept here, I suppose?"

"Yer stay here till yer go somewhere else."

"But I'd like to know——"

"Yer needn't ask no more questions, 'cause I shan't answer 'em," replied the ruffian abruptly. "Are yer done eatin'?"

"Yes."

"Then yer kin get back in yer hole."

"Can't I stay in this room?"

"No, yer can't. I'm goin' out, and I couldn't take no chances allowin' yer ter run loose in this room. Yer might get out somehow, and then I'd be in a pickle, for I've been paid to keep my eye on you until I kin get yer out of the city."

Whereupon the speaker took the boy by the shoulder and shoved him toward the little room where he had previously been confined, and willing or not Bob had to go back and submit to be locked in as before.

Having secured his prisoner to his satisfaction, the ruffian put on his hat and left the place.

How long he was gone this time Bob never knew, as the darkness and closeness of the small room in which he was locked up, coupled with many hours of sleep lost on the previous night, had their effect on the boy, who was unused to such cramped quarters, and he fell into a heavy sleep, from which he did not awake until after daylight next morning.

When the ruffian let him out to eat an hour later Bob noticed that the box in which he had been brought to the city was missing from the room.

The day passed drearily enough for the boy, who was

locked up in his little den every time his jailer went out or had visitors.

It was growing dark once more when the cadaverous rascal brought Bob his supper and released him from the dismal inner room to eat it.

This time, instead of cold food and water, a tray of cheap restaurant food with a cup of hot coffee stood on the table awaiting the boy.

Bob was hungry enough to eat most anything, and when the man told him to pitch in and eat his fill, he didn't wait to be asked twice.

He cleaned up everything in sight, including the coffee, which he thought tasted rather queer, especially the last of it.

Hardly had he finished before a sensation of drowsiness began to steal over him.

The feeling was so strange that he tried to throw it off.

His efforts to rise from the chair were failures, however.

His eyelids felt heavy, and would close in spite of everything he could do to keep them open, while the expression of his face took on a foolish, inert look, very different from the bright, smart expression which usually was seen there.

Although the boy didn't seem to realize what was actually the matter with him, the fact of the matter was he had been drugged.

Knock-out drops had been conveyed to him in the coffee, and in a very short time he was under the influence of a deadly stupor.

"He's safe enough now," grinned the ruffian, who had been watching the insidious effect of the drug from the start, as Bob's head fell forward on his arm. "He won't come to his senses afore to-morrer mornin', and by that time he'll be a long way from New York. "That's what I call makin' easy money."

The rascal smoked on till he finished his pipe, then he put on his hat and left the room.

About midnight he returned with a low-browed cab driver, whose vehicle was standing near the curb in front of the archway.

Between them they carried the insensible boy to the street, and lifted him into the cab.

The ruffian got in also, while the cabman mounted to his seat and drove away.

The vehicle finally turned into South street, and then kept on straight ahead till it came to a wharf not far from South Ferry.

Here a boat was in waiting manned by several sailors.

In the bottom lay three drunken seamen with their dunnage beside them.

Bob was stowed into a convenient space, and then the boat pushed off from the landing and was soon lost in the gloom of the night.

Just beyond the far entrance to Buttermilk Channel a weather-beaten brig lay at anchor.

She had cleared that afternoon for Kingston, Jamaica,

with an assorted cargo, much of it according to her manifest of a valuable character, and in consequence heavily insured.

She would sail with the first of the flood tide—that is, about two o'clock.

The boat containing Bob Ford and the three drunken sailors as passengers came alongside this vessel about one o'clock in the morning.

The hoisting tackle from a pair of vacant davits was attached to her, and she was lifted to her place just above the bulwarks and secured.

The four unconscious persons on board of her were taken into the forecastle and dropped into separate bunks to come to their senses at their leisure.

At half-past one the captain came aboard, and half an hour later the tide turned.

Just on the stroke of two a tug came alongside, made fast, and waited till the brig's anchor had broken ground.

As soon as the anchor was clear of the bottom the tug gave a couple of screeches, and started for the Narrows with the brig in tow.

An hour later, with all plain sail set, the brig Eudora was heading out to sea, while below in the forecastle Bob Ford lay like a log, utterly oblivious to the change which was taking place in his surroundings.

CHAPTER X.

WHAT BOB FOUND HIMSELF UP AGAINST ON THE EUDORA.

Shortly after six o'clock the chief mate of the brig Eudora went into the forecastle to rouse up the four hands who had been brought aboard in an unconscious condition before the vessel sailed.

The brig was now many miles at sea, entirely out of sight of land, and bowling along southward under a smacking wind.

Two of the three seamen were still so drunk that the mate let them lie where they were, and turned his attention to Bob Ford, who was now beginning to recover from his stupor.

A lively shaking brought the boy to his senses, and the realization that something new and strange had happened to him over-night.

"Tumble out, you lubber, and get on deck, d'ye hear?" roared the chief mate of the Eudora, yanking Bob unceremoniously out of the bunk on to the deck of the fore-castle.

The boy's head struck on the hard boards, and he saw numberless stars.

It woke him up to the fact that something was doing, however.

"Why, what's the matter? Where am I?" he blurted out, as he noticed how different were his surroundings to those of his last recollection.

The mate twisted his fingers into the collar of his jacket and pulled him to his feet.

"On deck with you, or I'll knock the daylights out of you!" he cried, in a menacing tone.

"On deck!" gasped Bob, in a puzzled tone. "Why, what do you mean?"

"That's what I mean," exclaimed the mate, snatching up a piece of rope and belaboring the boy's back and shoulders.

Bob tried to escape the punishment by dodging, but his foot caught in a cleat, and he pitched forward on his face.

The mate swooped down on him and laid the rope unsparingly all over his body.

"Get up, you young monkey, or I'll cut you into ribbons!" he shouted.

Bob scrambled to his feet, and in his efforts to get away from the instrument of torture he ran against the short ladder leading to the forecastle deck.

Running up this he found himself in the open air, on the deck of a vessel, with nothing around but water and the overarching sky.

"Good gracious!" as the truth dawned upon his brain. "I'm out at sea!"

The mate followed him on deck.

"Now, you lubber, get busy!" he roared.

"I'm not a sailor," protested the disheartened boy.

"Oh, you ain't, eh? Then what did you ship aboard this brig for?" the mate glared.

"I didn't ship. I don't know how it is I am here."

With a snarl of rage the chief mate raised the rope to bring it down on Bob's already raw and tingling back when the second mate came up and said:

"The cap'n wants that boy sent aft."

The chief mate paused with the rope's end in the air.

He looked aft and saw the skipper of the brig on the poop looking toward them.

"All right," he growled. "Take him along. I'll attend to him later on."

So Bob was hustled along the deck, past the morning watch, who eyed the boy with curious glances, for they detected the landlubber in his every move, and was finally pushed up the poop ladder into the presence of the captain.

Jabez Green, the master of the Eudora, was a big, stockily built man, who had been at sea from his youth up, serving in every capacity from green hand to his present exalted situation.

His was not a pleasant face to look upon, for it told its own story of harshness and an ungovernable temper.

He was a man that was not to be trifled with.

The top of his head looked like a mop of a brick-red hue, while his countenance was as thickly over-run with hair of the same color as the face of a Skye-terrier—and neither showed the civilizing influence of either comb or brush.

Where the skin showed on his low forehead, and in small patches under his heavy set eyes, it was tanned to the color of mahogany, while his nose was swollen and covered with rumblossoms.

Altogether he was a formidable-looking man, even when at peace with himself.

As a rule, however, he made Rome howl when he was on deck, and when below his constant companion was a pot-bellied stone jug of Holland gin.

Captain Green looked Bob over from head to foot in a way that made the boy shiver in spite of his natural courage.

He put Bob in mind of an ogre he had once read about in a fairy story when he was very young.

"So you're the young imp Mulligan sent aboard, eh?"

Bob hadn't the least idea who Mulligan was, though as a matter of fact Mulligan was the cadaverous ruffian to whose tender mercies Weaver had resigned him the day he brought the lad to New York.

As Bob was ignorant of Mulligan's identity he said nothing.

The captain accepted his silence as a token of assent.

"You're a greenhorn, good for nothing but to feed to the sharks," he grinned fiendishly. "You're no better than a stowaway, and when I catch one of them aboard my ship I make 'em wish they were dead a thousand times a day, d'ye understand?"

Bob looked the skipper, whom he rightly judged to be a tyrant, straight in the eye, and as this was a new sensation for the man he ripped out a fearful oath and raised his huge hairy fist in a threatening manner.

"Don't look at me in that way, you scum of the sea! Do you know I could kill you for sassin' me with your eyes, and nothin' would be said about it?"

Bob was willing to believe that Captain Green was equal to any outrage that a ruffianly nature might suggest, so not wishing to aggravate the man further he looked down on the deck.

"Since you're no good as a sailor," went on the skipper, "you can't expect to earn any wages. As long as you're aboard this brig you'll want to eat, of course. Then you'll have to earn your food."

"I'm willing to make myself useful in any way now that I'm here, but I didn't come here of my own accord."

"Who the blazes cares whether you came of your own accord or not? You're here, and you've got to work, whether you're willin' or not. As you're good for nothin' else you must help the steward and keep the cabin shipshape, d'ye understand?"

Bob understood.

"Now go below and report to the steward, and if you don't do things right up to the handle, I'll mash your head in with a belayin'-pin."

Captain Green raised his foot and made a kick at Bob to hasten his retreat.

The boy, however, was too quick for him, and darted for the ladder.

As the skipper had calculated on boosting him along, thus furnishing himself with entertainment that jibed well with his ugly nature, and had consequently put a good deal of force into his leg, he came to grief, for his foot

meeting with no resistance carried his leg into the air, and this overbalanced his body, and he came down sprawling on the deck with a force that seemed to shake the brig.

With a roar like a mad bull he scrambled to his feet and glared around for the boy who had been the cause of his mishap.

He was furious enough at that moment to have killed Bob on the spot.

Bob, however, was out of sight.

The captain's rage was diverted from him by seeing a grin on the face of one of the sailors below.

He leaped forward at a bound, and rushing at the seaman dealt him a blow with his ponderous fist that stretched him bleeding and unconscious on the deck.

"You'll laugh at me, will you?" he roared, giving his victim a kick in the ribs. "Get up or——"

Then he saw that the sailor was senseless.

He thereupon looked around for someone else on whom to vent his temper, but the watch had prudently scattered, and he had to give up his amiable intention.

Fortunately for Bob, who was now in the pantry, he had forgotten all about him, and so the boy escaped that time.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT BOB OVERHEARD IN THE STOREROOM.

The steward was a dark-skinned, snaky-looking little man of Hindu origin, who had sailed several voyages with Captain Green.

He was about the only person on board the Eudora who wasn't afraid of the skipper.

Apparently the captain had already spoken to him about Bob, for he made no remark when the boy told him he had been sent to him to be put to work.

He pointed to the plates and other dishes in their racks, the knives and forks in a covered box, and then told the boy to set the cabin table.

Bob hastened to do it in the best shape he knew how, and when he returned to the pantry the steward asked him his name.

"Bob Ford."

"My name is Singh Small," said the steward, showing a glittering row of perfectly white teeth. "S'pose cap'n buldoze you, tell me. I no stand for it."

Bob looked at his lithe, sinewy figure; his perfectly formed hands, as small as a woman's; and he wondered what show he would stand against the burly skipper if the latter once got his hands on him.

Jabez Green, however, never attempted to monkey with his steward.

He would curse everybody else in the brig, from the chief mate down, when his temper was upset, but he never swore at Singh Small.

The steward attended strictly to business, and when he was through he would sit in the pantry and smoke a peculiar shaped pipe.

In a short time the cook came aft with the cabin break-

fast, and the skipper and his chief mate went down to eat. Bob stood around and waited on them.

When they had finished the captain went to his stateroom, and the first mate went on deck and relieved the second mate, who came to the table and had his meal.

Bob carried the dirty dishes to the galley, and then he and Singh Small partook of their breakfast in the pantry.

Bob helped the steward for awhile, and was then sent to tidy things up in the cabin.

Later on the steward showed the boy where the vessel's stores were kept in a small space aft between decks, entrance to which was had through a trap-door.

After dinner Captain Green ordered Bob to black his boots, so the boy got the necessary materials, and set to work.

When his shoes shone like a new silver dollar, he made Bob bring him the jug of gin from his private locker, take down a glass from the swinging tray under the sky-light, and fetch out his box of strong cigars.

"Now tell Mr. Ruggles that I want to see him," the skipper said, meaning his chief mate; "and don't you come in here no more till I send for you."

Bob delivered the message, and then retired to the pantry to scour up the knives, and attend to such other work as the steward laid out for him to do.

Although our hero had never been out of sight of land in his life before, there was little danger of his experiencing any of the unpleasant sensations of seasickness as long as the weather continued as fine as it was at present.

There were two berths in the little room off the pantry where the steward slept, and Singh Small told the boy to take possession of the upper one.

Several days passed in this manner, the weather still holding fine and the brig sailing on a slight angle to the leeward.

Bob ascertained that the Eudora was bound for Kingston, Jamaica, direct, and would pass through the Windward Passage.

He was pleased to know that he was not fated to undergo a long foreign trip of many months' duration, and confidently expected that he would soon be able to return to the United States.

Next day the weather turned dirty, and in the choppy sea which the brig ran into Bob got his first acquaintance with seasickness.

For the ensuing thirty-six hours he was a very miserable boy.

The captain would have made it a good deal more unpleasant for him but for the steward, who had a few words to say on the subject, with the result that Bob was not interfered with.

Captain Green had it in for him, though, as the boy judged from the unpleasant reception he got from the skipper the moment he was able to resume his duties in the cabin.

But Bob had determined not to talk back to the great mogul of the brig under any circumstances, so he took his

medicine and said nothing about it even to Singh Small, who seemed to be the only friend he had on board.

The captain and the chief mate both handled him without gloves from that time on, though they didn't actually hurt him in any way.

One afternoon when the brig was in the neighborhood of the Bahama Islands the steward sent Bob into the storeroom for some canned goods that he wanted for supper.

He took one of the ship's lanterns, opened the trap-door, went down, and closed it after him.

He had hardly started to hunt for the case he was in search of when the light began to grow dim, presently sputtered, and went out altogether, leaving him in the darkness.

"I must have taken a lantern that hadn't any oil in it," muttered Bob. "I'll have to go back and fill it."

At that moment, however, the trap, some feet away, was lifted, and a pair of legs, followed by a long body, appeared through the opening, and dropped into the storeroom.

"Come on," said the newcomer, in the voice of the chief mate, as he moved out of the way.

Another pair of legs and a chunky body came down, and the skipper of the brig landed in the lazaretto.

"Close the trap," said Ruggles, shortly.

The captain closed it.

Bob had no wish for those two men to discover him down there, notwithstanding that he had business in the storeroom.

He feared personal violence at their hands, for they couldn't have a better chance to attack him than in that closed space.

So he shrank back behind a pile of cases, and almost held his breath.

"What did you bring me down here for, Ruggles?" demanded the skipper, in an ungracious tone.

"Because I wanted to talk to you without fear of being overheard."

"Oh, you did," snarled the captain, with an oath. "It must be something mighty particular you have to say."

"It is."

"Well, spit it out quick. I don't care to stay in this hole any longer than I can help."

"I want to ask you a question or two," said the mate, in a pointed tone.

"Go on."

"This brig and her cargo are heavily insured, aren't they?"

"What business is that of yours?" roared Captain Green, with a savage oath.

"It's my idea they are. It is also my idea that the Eudora is not expected by her owners to reach port this trip."

With a roar like a mad bull the captain made a spring at his mate, but the man evidently expected some such demonstration, for he sprang aside in the dark, and easily evaded the skipper.

Captain Green swore like a trooper, and groped around trying to locate his companion, but the attempt was fruitless.

He soon exhausted himself, as the mate surmised he would, and came to a halt.

"It won't do you any good to have a run-in with me," spoke up the mate coolly. "I'm on to the whole game, so we might just as well come to an understanding as not."

The captain shot off another volley of oaths.

"I'll tell you how I came to tumble to the business. I had charge, as you know, of the loading of the brig. Some of the most valuable of the cargo, according to the bills of lading, are stowed amidships. One day I accidentally discovered that one of these cases contained nothing of more importance than old bits of broken iron. I didn't know what to make of the matter, but I am not a fool, and concluded to look further. My investigations showed me that every one of those cases, supposed to contain high-priced machinery, held nothing but useless truck. I was satisfied there was some deep game in the wind. I kept my eyes skinned, and found numerous other instances of grave discrepancies between what the manifest showed and what the cargo actually was. I said nothing about it at the time. A still tongue makes a wise head. I determined to keep my own counsel until I had sounded you. A man who gets full of gin like you do is easy game. He lets out many things he ought not to. Well, you have told me enough since we left port to put me next to the game."

Captain Green uttered a round oath.

Ruggles laughed irritably.

"What's the use of cutting up rusty with me, Cap'n Green? Nobody on the brig but you and I has any suspicion of the true state of affairs. I'm ready to stand in with you on this thing. You're going to get a round sum for running this brig ashore on one of the small sandy keys of the Bahamas, where she'll go to pieces under the first gale that sweeps these seas. I'll help you do it, and shut my eyes to the transaction, for one-third of what you are to get; but you must deal fairly with me, or I'll blow the whole thing as sure as my name is Jim Ruggles."

There was a short silence, and Bob heard the captain breathing heavily at the foot of the steps that led out of the storeroom.

Evidently he was loth to come to any agreement with his officer, and yet he could not help seeing that the mate had him cornered, and that there wasn't any hole he could squeeze out at.

"Well, cap'n, is it a bargain? You know you can't carry this scheme out without I stand in with you. And you know you can't land your cargo at Kingston and escape detection. You're up against it any way you may look at it."

"I s'pose I'll have to agree," muttered Captain Green. "But it's agin me to do it."

"I'm to have an honest third of your share, am I?"

"Yes; and in return you agree to help me put the game through?"

"I'll do that willingly," replied the mate, in an exultant tone.

"Then it's a bargain. Give me your hand on it."

The two men came together and shook hands over their criminal arrangement.

CHAPTER XII.

CAUGHT.

"Now," said the chief mate, "since we're hand-in-glove in this affair tell me what scheme you have in view for losing the brig. I s'pose you mean to run her ashore on one of the low sandy keys hereabouts, don't you?"

"My plan was to scuttle the brig within easy reach of Cat Island, or Watling's. The Eudora is an old vessel, and who could say that the recent spell of dirty weather we had might not have sprung a plank in her bottom?"

"That's right," grinned Ruggles.

"After the water gained a good headway the pumps would not be able to save her, especially if it was found they were out of order."

"Quite correct," agreed the mate.

"Then she'd go to the bottom, and all evidence as to the true character of her cargo would be lost."

"That plan is much safer than running the brig ashore, which I couldn't very well have accomplished with you and Mr. Bruce alternately on deck every night in charge of the vessel's course."

"That's true. But now that I'm with you it would be a simple matter to put her ashore on one of the smaller keys if you want to do so."

"But I don't want to do so. I want to put her out of sight altogether, so that there will not be the remotest chance of any evidence turning up to queer the game of the owners, who rely upon me to see them through safely."

"Well, you are the doctor, and I stand ready to give you a helping hand in any way you may direct," said the mate.

"I certainly look to you to do your share of the work, as I have promised you a third of the profits."

"As I attended to the loading of the greater part of the brig's cargo, I don't see how you propose to get at the vessel's bottom so as to bore the holes necessary to accomplish your purpose."

"All that was provided for before a ton of cargo was put into the brig," said the captain with a chuckle.

"In what way?" asked the mate, in an interested tone.

"A dozen auger holes were partly bored through the bottom planks at different places along the run, and were then plugged to guard against an accidental leakage. There is sufficient space in the run between the planking overhead which supports the first tier of freight and the keel for a man of my build to crawl comfortably. I had a trap cut in the flooring of this store-room, and a ladder built communicating with the run close to the rudder-post, so that I could enter the hold at any time without anyone aboard becoming the wiser of the fact. I had calculated on making my first trip down there to-night, when I expected to finish the boring of the holes, replugging them

as I proceeded. When all were finished I meant to knock the plugs out one after the other, and make my escape back to the cabin. It would be some time before the brig's condition would be noticed in this weather. By that time I believed the water would have made such progress that with the demoralized condition of the pumps the vessel could not be saved. At the proper moment I would abandon the brig to her fate, and in a short time she would go to the bottom."

"Your scheme is a first-class one," said the mate.

"It couldn't well be better. Now, since I have had to take you into my confidence I will turn the manual labor of finishing the borings and the final removing of the plugs over to you. We will go down into the hold now, with a lantern which is hanging ready for business in yonder corner, and you can inspect the work that has been partially accomplished and figure upon what remains to be done to finish the job. When the first watch comes on duty and Mr. Bruce takes charge of the deck, you can then go into the hold and attend to the work, notifying me as soon as you have finished it. We will then complete our arrangements for abandoning the brig."

"All right," agreed the chief mate.

The captain struck a match, and the glare disclosed a lantern hanging near the trapdoor.

He took it down and lit it.

Then he removed several small cases from one side of the storeroom, knelt down, and feeling about on the floor seized a small brass ring in his fingers and pulled up a trap-door, disclosing a black void underneath.

Beckoning to Ruggles, the captain flashed the light of the lantern down into the depths, and the mate saw the upper part of the ladder which led to the keel near the rudder post.

"The auger is at the foot of this ladder," said the skipper. "Follow me."

He swung the lantern over his arm and started to descend, when a tremendous crash a few feet away startled them both, the captain almost losing his balance on the top rung of the ladder.

Recovering himself with a strong effort he raised the lantern on high, and then the two men saw Bob Ford standing in the midst of the wreck of a pile of overturned cases of stores, his white face gazing at them with a look of mingled horror and fear.

Bob had been so overcome by the discovery of the villainous design contemplated by Captain Green and his chief mate that in the confusion and excitement of his feelings he had leaned too hard against the pile of boxes, and they had suddenly toppled over and thus disclosed his presence in the storeroom at a most unfortunate moment for his own safety.

With a terrible oath the skipper sprang at the boy, followed by the somewhat unnerved mate.

"What are you doing down here, you infernal young monkey?" he roared fiercely.

"I came down to get some canned goods for supper,"

blurted out Bob, thoroughly dismayed by the pickle he found himself in.

"And how long have you been here, eh?" demanded the captain violently.

Bob did not know what reply to make to this question, so he remained silent.

"How long, you jackanapes?" thundered the skipper, with a malevolent gleam in his eyes.

"He must have been down here when we came," said the mate, hoarsely, "and he's heard everything that passed between us."

"You were down here when we came, weren't you?" snarled Captain Green, with a menacing shake of his head.

"Yes," admitted Bob, who scorned to tell a lie, even if such a subterfuge would have availed him any.

"Then you heard every word of our conversation?"

"Yes," answered Bob, doggedly.

The two men looked at each other, and wiped the perspiration from their foreheads.

Evidently they were up against it hard, and the thought simultaneously occurred to both that the only way out of the difficulty was to silence the witness before he got a chance to spread the news throughout the brig.

"We can't let him get away," said Ruggles, "or the game will be up with us."

"When you saw us come down here why didn't you show yourself, instead of hiding behind those cases and listening to all we said?" demanded the skipper, in an ugly tone. "Who told you to spy on our movements, eh?"

"I was afraid to let you know I was here for fear you would attack me, as you have been in the habit of doing without any provocation at all."

"It would have been a deal better for you had you made your presence here known to us at the start-off, now we've got to take measures to protect ourselves against your tongue. You know too much for our good. You know our plans and purposes, and if we were to let you escape from here you'd put the brig's company up to what's going to happen, and we'd be in no end of trouble. Since you chose to put your head into the lion's mouth you've got to suffer the consequences. Grab him, Ruggles!"

The chief mate darted upon the boy and seized him, while Captain Green, after putting the lantern down on one of the overturned boxes, picked up a coil of thin rope and prepared to take a hand in the proceedings himself.

Bob put up a stout resistance, but he was no match for the two men.

They bound him hand and foot, and then glowered down upon his helplessness.

"You know that we intend to scuttle the brig, don't you?" said the captain.

Bob made no reply.

"You're welcome to the knowledge, for we mean that it shan't do you any good. We're going to take you down to the bottom of the hold with us, bind you to the lower rungs of the ladder, and leave you to go down with the

vessel some hours hence—d'ye understand?" spoke up the skipper, with vindictive earnestness.

Bob hardly realized at that moment the awful doom to which these men proposed to consign him, so confused was his senses in relation to the whole matter.

He could scarcely believe that Captain Green and his chief mate were really in earnest about destroying the brig, notwithstanding the confidential nature of the conversation he had so recently overheard.

The whole thing seemed more likely an ugly dream than an actual fact.

The skipper of the Eudora and his rascally mate, however, were in deadly earnest about the business in hand—both with reference to the sinking of the vessel and the utter wiping out of Bob Ford, who was now so dangerous to their interests.

Captain Green took up the lantern again and began to go down the ladder.

The mate lowered the helpless boy down to him, and then followed himself, closing the trap after him.

CHAPTER XIII.

LIKE RATS IN A TRAP.

The scoundrels and their victim had hardly disappeared from the storeroom when the upper trap was lifted, a dark countenance was thrust down, and a pair of glittering eyes peered around into the darkness.

"Bob—Bob Ford, where you got yourself to, eh?" asked the voice of Singh Small.

The steward spoke impatiently, and seemed surprised that he got no answer.

"Where that boy can be, I wonder?" he muttered. "He is not here, for he make no answer, and there is no light. Yet he did not come back with the stuff I sent him for. It is not like him to act this way. He is always quick to get what I want. Maybe something happen him. I will see."

The steward went back to the pantry and lit a lantern.

With that in his hands he returned to the storeroom to investigate.

The first thing he saw was the overturned cases and the lantern Bob had taken from the pantry standing close to them without any light in it.

Then he saw the cases that Captain Green had moved out from the bulkhead to get at the trapdoor opening into the hold.

Singh Small thought this disarrangement of the stores very strange indeed, for he had been down there that morning, and then everything had been in good order.

As nobody but he or Bob was supposed to go to the storeroom he attributed the disorder to the boy, and was rather puzzled to account for it.

But the main question that bothered the steward was where had Bob gone to?"

Singh Small picked up the lantern and looked at it.

It was certainly the one the boy had taken from the pantry.

He flashed his own lantern about the storeroom, and finally behind the cases the skipper had moved out.

His sharp eyes immediately detected the trapdoor.

Evidently Bob or somebody else had moved those boxes to get at this trap.

Singh Small never let anything get by him.

That trap-door had been put there for some purpose, and the steward was curious to learn what that purpose was.

He opened it and looked down.

It was as dark as the ace of spades below, but the lantern's gleam showed him the top of the ladder.

Could Bob have gone down there?

If he had, why had he done so, and why hadn't he taken the lantern with him to light his way?

Singh Small pondered for a moment over the question, then he decided to go down himself and see what he could find out below.

With the agility of a monkey the steward descended the ladder, carrying his lantern in one hand.

Reaching the hold he came with startling suddenness upon Bob Ford, securely bound to the lower rungs.

Singh Small flashed the light all over the boy, and uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"What does this mean, eh? Who done this?"

"Sh!" replied Bob, warningly. "The captain and the chief mate brought me down here and tied me to this ladder. They are now somewhere in the run under the cargo. They are going to scuttle the brig to-night and leave me here to perish with her. Cut me loose, quick, before they come back," he added, eagerly.

"Why they want to scuttle the brig, eh?"

"I'll tell you all about it when we get to the pantry," said Bob, impatient to get free from his desperate situation.

"No, you tell me now," said the steward, his eyes sparkling strangely.

"I'm afraid they'll be back and surprise us before I could tell you the story."

"I no have a knife. You must stay here till I come back by and by. Now tell me why—ah! I hear them. They are coming this way. I must be off. But do not be afraid. I am your friend. I will see that you get free after a while."

With these words Singh Small darted up the ladder and disappeared.

Five minutes later when Ruggles passed the pantry the steward was very busy at his regular duties, but he gave the mate a look out of the corner of his little beady eyes that meant the officer no good.

A little later he entered the cabin to set the table himself, and found Captain Green there with his gin jug.

"You know where that boy Bob is?" he asked the skipper.

The captain shook his head.

"He should be here to set the table. I think he is getting lazy," continued the steward.

Ordinarily the captain would have sworn roundly at the boy, and have ordered Singh Small to send a sailor to look the lad up.

Now, however, he hadn't a word to say on the matter, but drank his gin with more than usual relish.

Night gradually fell, the lamps in the cabin were lighted by the steward, and supper was served to the captain and his chief mate.

Afterwards Ruggles went on deck and relieved the second officer, as was his custom.

Four bells announced the end of the second dog watch at eight o'clock, and then the first watch went on duty, the second mate taking charge of the deck.

It was a cloudy night, and a stiff breeze hummed through the brig's rigging.

The watch below had turned in, and everything was ship-shape for the night.

Singh Small had cleaned up, put out the pantry light, and had apparently gone to rest, as he was accustomed to do about that hour.

But never was the Hindu more wide awake in his life.

He had taken his seat in the pantry whence, through a crack in the door, he was able to view the cabin, where the captain was drinking again, and the entrance to the passage, in the floor of which was the trap-door opening into the storeroom.

In a short time the chief mate appeared, spoke a few words to the skipper, and after looking cautiously around to make sure he was not observed, he went into the passage, lifted the trap-door, and disappeared into the lazaretto.

Singh Small grinned in a way peculiar to himself, and after that watched the captain.

That worthy appeared quite contented to replenish his glass from the stone jug every time it became empty, and puff at his big black cigar as though not a thing in the world troubled him.

Two hours passed in this manner, with Singh Small as wide-awake as ever.

At last four bells, or ten o'clock, was struck by the second mate on deck.

Hardly had the sound died away when Ruggles reappeared through the trapdoor in the passage.

He came directly to the captain and engaged him in low conversation.

In fifteen minutes he retired to his cabin.

Captain Green also got up from the table, and taking the jug with him retired to his cabin.

The steward made no move for perhaps twenty minutes, then, with a sharp knife in one hand, and a lighted lantern in the other, he glided out into the cabin, listened at the chief mate's door, then at the captain's, and feeling satisfied there was no fear of immediate interruption from them, he passed like a shadow into the passage, lifted the trap, and dropped noiselessly into the storeroom.

He saw that the boxes had been replaced on the trap-door leading to the hold.

He quickly removed them, threw open the trap, and descended into the hold.

As the light flashed below him he saw there was all of four feet of water at the foot of the ladder, and that it was nearly up to Bob Ford's armpits.

"I had almost given up hope," said the boy, in a hoarse, unnatural tone. "The water has been steadily creeping up about me ever since the chief mate completed his job in the run. The vessel is scuttled and sinking. The pumps have been tampered with, and I guess she's sure to go down in a few hours."

While Bob was speaking Singh Small was hurriedly cutting him loose from the ladder.

"Come," said the steward when the boy was free, "follow me up. We talk in the pantry. Then perhaps we are able to do something."

Up darted the Hindu with Bob at his heels, and truly thankful was the boy at having thus escaped the fate designed for him by the captain and the chief mate.

But when Singh Small was within a yard of the trap the face of Ruggles suddenly appeared above, glaring down at him, as he swung a lantern over the hole.

"So, Singh Small," he cried maliciously, "you will butt in where you're not wanted, eh? I suspected you, you smart Aleck of a Hindu, and I have kept my eyes skinned for some move on your part. You're pretty slick, but not slick enough to get the best of me. You've cut the boy loose, I see. Well, you'll have to take a dose of his medicine, too. I've got you both like rats in a trap, and together you'll drown with the other rats in the hold. Good-by to you both, and good riddance."

Bang went the cover, and from the noise that succeeded both Bob and the steward knew that the chief mate was piling the cases back on top of the trap.

They were certainly in a desperate situation.

CHAPTER XIV.

ASHORE.

Singh Small uttered an exclamation in Hindostanese as the trap was slammed down almost in his face, while Bob Ford, who had easily heard the vindictive words of the chief mate, and realized their import, was thoroughly startled and dismayed by the unexpected turn affairs had taken.

"My gracious!" cried the boy, in a dispirited tone. "What shall we do now?"

The Hindu muttered something unintelligible to Bob, and tried to push up the trap, but the weight of the boxes that Ruggles had placed upon it defeated his efforts.

Then he swung the lantern to the right and left of where he stood, as if seeking another outlet from the hole in which they were trapped.

He knew that in the upper hold, or 'tweendecks, facing them, a couple of feet of vacant space lay between the top tier of merchandise stowed on that deck and the flooring of the brig's main deck.

His object was to try and make his way with Bob into

that space, traverse the top of the cargo for the entire length of the vessel, and then by knocking against the floor of the forecastle arouse the attention of the watch below to the fact that there was something in the hold that had no business to be there, and thus cause an investigation that would result in their liberation.

Nothing, however, met his eye but the boards of the strong bulkhead which separated them from the main part of the hold.

The prospect, therefore, of escaping the terrible fate allotted to them by Ruggles was far from encouraging.

Clinging to a ladder in the semi-darkness of their narrow prison, with the lap of the ever-rising water below sounding in their ears and foreshadowing their doom, was not the pleasantest situation in the world.

The groaning and thumping of the rudder within a yard of them sounded preternaturally loud, and the splashing of the water, too, as it struck against the brig's stern outside.

Singh Small descended to the depths to take notice how fast the water was accumulating in the hold, and his report on his return aloft was not a cheerful one for poor Bob to hear.

Thus two hours passed away, and the hitherto buoyant motion of the brig was now a sluggish roll and pitch, owing to the weight of the water she had taken aboard.

A new sound now came to them.

It was the grating noise of the pumps which jarred on their ears.

The fact that the brig was leaking had come to the attention of the second mate and the watch on deck on the eve of midnight.

The pumps, however, worked hard, and did not properly perform their duty.

In fact, one of them was found to be completely out of business, while the other worked very badly indeed.

So, when eight bells was sounded, which brought the watch below on deck, the other sailors thus relieved made no attempt to go to rest, as the situation was seen to be alarming.

The water gained steadily, as the only available pump could not throw out one half of what was coming in through the dozen holes the chief mate had punched in the vessel's bottom.

After an hour's work it seemed to be a foregone conclusion that the brig's doom was sealed.

The chief mate, who now had charge of the deck, told the men to get the boats ready for abandoning the brig.

The captain was notified of the condition of the vessel, just as if he hadn't been waiting in the seclusion of his stateroom for the news.

Then he came on deck and began to supervise the arrangements started by his ally.

As their course on the chart showed that they were not more than fifty or sixty miles to the eastward of Watling's Island, where there was a settlement at which Captain Green proposed to stop first after abandoning the brig,

no apprehension was felt by the sailors that they were placed in any unusual peril by the sinking of their craft.

The chief mate let it be generally known that in his opinion the vessel had sprung some of her timbers, which were old, in the late gale, and as the cargo prevented the carpenter from ascertaining just where the injury was and repairing the same, and as the pumps had gone back on them at the critical moment, why, the fate of the brig seemed to be certain.

The crew accepted this view of the situation, as they thought the chief mate ought to know what he was talking about, and so they went cheerfully to work to water and provision the boats for what was understood to be a short trip to the nearest land.

The men were kept steadily at work at the pumps, and encouraged to do their best, as Captain Green wanted it to subsequently appear that he had done his best to try and save his vessel.

When on consultation with Ruggles the captain was satisfied that the brig would go down within an hour, he gave orders for the men to take to the boats which had been towing alongside for some little time.

Each man was permitted to take a small quantity of his belongings with him, and the skipper and his officers also carried with them their most valuable possessions.

All being in readiness, the three boats, each in charge of the captain or one of the mates, pushed off and laid their course for Watling's Island.

Neither the second mate, nor any of the crew, had remarked the absence of Singh Small, the steward, or Bob Ford, his assistant; or if he had he naturally supposed these two persons were in one of the other boats.

At any rate, nothing was said about them, for the captain was the last to leave the brig, and when he gave the order to abandon the fated vessel the inference was that he believed no one had been accidentally left behind.

It was his duty, at any rate, to see that all his hands were taken off.

And so the boats rowed away to the westward, leaving the brig to pursue her way aimlessly forward until such moment as she could go no further, and the relentless sea claimed her for its prey.

And all this time Bob Ford and the Hindu steward were hanging in helpless proximity to approaching death to the ladder in the narrow space between the bulkhead wall of the hold and the rudder sternpost.

Their only avenue of exit was blocked above them, and as the movement of the vessel grew more and more sluggish, as the water rose higher and higher in the hold, their spirits sank lower and lower in their breasts, for they believed that the brig's doom was theirs as well.

The clang of the pump to which they had been listening for more than two hours ceased at last, and now the only sounds that came to them were the swish of the sea outside against the stern and the rattle of the rudder chains.

"It all up with us," said Singh Small, breaking a long silence. "The crew have now leave the brig. They no

more work the pump. The vessel go down soon. We go too. All over quick."

Singh Small awaited death with a stolid indifference characteristic of his race.

In the boy's mind, however, a score of conflicting emotions ran riot.

He was young and full of life, and death came hard to him.

At last, after an hour's interval, even he began to grow indifferent as to when their fate was to overtake them.

Thus the Eudora sailed forward under a rising wind which forced her somewhat faster ahead on her erratic course.

She sank lower and lower in the sea, but still she managed to keep afloat.

At last, as the tropical sun was peeping above the watery horizon, she ran smack upon the sandy shore of a small key—one of the numerous islets of the Bahama group.

The shore being low and shelving she ran upon it for something more than half her length, and then tilted over on her beam ends.

The shock of the vessel coming to a stop nearly shook Bob and the steward from their hold on the ladder.

They both thought the end had come as the brig careened over on her port side.

There was a tremendous crash above them, as the cases of stores in the lazaretto shifted and fell in a heap on the down side.

Then, like the calm that follows a heavy shock of earthquake, the brig lay quite still, and naught was to be heard but the gurgle of the swirling water about the stern.

Bob was the first to recover his presence of mind.

Clearly some important change had come over the situation.

The vessel was quite stationary—showing no further tendency to go forward on her undirected course, nor down into the depths.

"It must mean," thought the boy, with a gleam of hope, "that the brig has run ashore somewhere."

CHAPTER XV.

THE IRON-BOUND CHEST.

The steward realized the meaning of the situation as soon as the stupor cleared from his brain.

He had been to sea long enough to know what the listing of the vessel on her beam meant.

"We no sink further at present," he said to the boy. "We ashore on some key—sandy island—plenty of such in this sea. Now if find some way to get out we safe."

"Try the trap again," suggested Bob, eagerly, for the crash he had heard over their heads, together with the slant of the brig away from the trap, gave him the idea that the cases had fallen away from their former position.

Singh Small acted upon his words at once, and sure enough the trap easily yielded to his hand.

"Good," he cried, exultantly. "We get out."

He clambered through the opening with the lantern hanging to his arm, and then bent down to help Bob out, too.

The flash of the light showed that all the stores were piled in great confusion to the port, many of the boxes being broken and their contents scattered around.

But the condition of the stores gave them no concern at that moment—their thoughts were bent on getting on deck and seeing where they were.

There was little difficulty in accomplishing their exit from the lazaretto, and they soon climbed the brass-bound steps in front of the binnacle, which held the compass, and stood up on the sloping poop-deck, supporting themselves by the spokes of the wheel, with the early morning sun shining full in their faces, and the stiff sea breeze playing through their hair and fanning their cheeks.

How glorious it was to be free!—free from the darkness and terrors of their late prison house.

The Eudora had poked her nose high and dry on the sand of the key, and then rolled over to port, as if exhausted by her recent strenuous exertions to keep afloat with so much salt water inside of her.

Apparently she had made up her mind to remain where she was until a heavy blow forced her further ashore, or dragged her back into the sea that swirled about her partially submerged stern in disappointment at having lost such a delicious morsel.

"We safe at last, Bob," grinned Singh Small. "Cheat Cap'n Green and mate Ruggles. Make 'em sweat bimeby," and his snaky eyes glittered ominously.

Bob, however, had no part in the revengeful feelings that moved the Hindu.

He looked abroad at the little island on which the brig had been cast.

It was scarcely more than a third of a mile long, and probably not over half that across at its widest part.

In the center, on a bit of rising soil, a cluster of plantain trees reared their long leafy heads to the breeze.

There might have been a dozen of them in all, in the midst of a patch of tropical vegetation.

There was nothing else on the little island but sand.

Ordinarily it was not a desirable spot to be cast away upon; but any port in a storm is the mariner's adage, and Bob was grateful for that bleak patch of solid ground after his recent experiences.

He and Singh Small left the stranded brig and walked over to the plantain patch.

There in the shade of their long, waving limbs they looked abroad on the water that surrounded their little foothold in every direction.

"How are we going to get away from this place?" asked Bob, as the important question presented itself to his mind.

"How?" replied the steward. "Not so hard. We build raft. No sink. Then float to bigger island, or some vessel pick us up. Begin to make it soon as have something to eat. No tell how long calm last. P'haps only day or

two, maybe two week. Maybe not twenty-four hour. No tell anything in this latitude."

"All right," answered the boy, cheerfully. "You know more about it than I do. You've been at sea a long time, while this is my first trip."

"I been down this way six times," nodded Singh Small, checking his Caribbean trips off on his finger tips. "Bad place when wind blow heavy and kick up nasty sea. No leave anything of brig after two or three hour. S'pose we not blow away, too, what we eat? Everything aboard vessel."

"We ought to bring some of the canned stuff ashore and bury it in the sand. Then if a gale comes up unexpectedly we won't starve."

"Good plan," said the steward, nodding approvingly. "We do that bimeby, if weather look bad. No waste time if not."

They returned aboard of the brig, and Bob remained on the tilted deck while Singh Small got something to eat and drink for both.

When they had finished their meal the steward got out a saw, hatchet, and other tools for the construction of the raft he had in view.

Bob was satisfied to let the Hindu direct matters, since his nautical experience was now of great advantage to them.

The brig had a couple of spare spars lashed forward, and these with Bob's help were soon cut loose and shoved overboard with a mooring rope attached to each.

Two smaller spars were found secured on top of the galley-house.

These were used as cross-pieces, and under the steward's direction securely lashed with stout ropes at the ends of the long ones, forming a parallelogram, the base on which the raft was to be built.

Two empty water casks were lashed, one at each end, of the raft, to give it buoyancy.

The doors of the four staterooms were unhinged and securely nailed across the raft to form the foundation of the deck.

A portion of the galley was then taken apart, and the boards thus obtained were used to raise the deck a foot above the base.

By this time a pretty substantial raft had been constructed, but there was still considerable work to be done on it.

Singh Small, however, said it was time to knock off for dinner, and Bob was glad to quit for awhile, as he was not used to laboring under a tropical sun.

They did not resume work until five o'clock, when a fresh breeze sprang up and tempered the sultriness of the air.

The steward dumped out the contents of the carpenter's chest, and several of the chests in the forecastle that had necessarily been abandoned by their owners when they quit the brig, and these were lashed with ropes and also nailed around the outer edges of the raft.

Singh Small proposed to fill them with canned goods, and such other provisions as would not be affected by salt water.

Next morning the canned provisions were taken from the Eudora's storeroom, and placed in the chests on the raft.

Then, while the steward was putting up a kind of mast, with a cross-piece to support a small section of canvas to be used as a sail or an awning, as circumstances might dictate, Bob got a spade and started for the plantain grove to dig a shallow trench in which he intended to stow away three small boxes of canned goods in case they would be needed by anybody cast away like themselves.

He selected an inviting space in the midst of the trees, and began to dig.

He had turned up perhaps a dozen shovelful of sand when the edge of his spade struck something hard that gave out a metallic sound.

Wondering what the obstruction could be, Bob cleared away the sand from the top of it, and then discovered that it was a small cedar chest of ancient manufacture, clamped with iron bands, and covered with numerous iron knobs.

It had evidently been a very long time hidden in the sands of the key, and looked for all the world like one of the old treasure chests of a century or two previous.

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Bob, in some excitement. "I wonder what's in it?"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TREASURE TROVE.

The discovery of the iron-bound chest in the sand of the key temporarily put to flight Bob's plan of burying the three cases of canned goods.

"I wonder what's in it?" repeated Bob, half aloud, as he knelt down, and with his fingers scraped the sand away from the quaint-looking, old-fashioned lock. "From its appearance it looks as if it held something of value."

Resuming work around it with his shovel, he soon had it entirely uncovered.

When he tried to lift it out of its bed he found it altogether too heavy for him to move.

"I must call Singh Small," he said.

So he returned to where the steward was busily engaged upon the raft.

"I have found something in the sand among those trees," he said to the Hindu.

"What you found?" asked the steward, pausing in his work.

"An iron-bound chest."

"I go look at it," said Singh Small.

He accompanied Bob to the spot where the chest lay.

He, too, tested the weight of it.

"We break open and see what's inside. Maybe money," he remarked with an avaricious gleam in his snaky eyes. "You wait here; I get some tools."

Singh Small fetched a heavy hammer and a cold chisel, with which he attacked the brass-bound lock.

It seemed to defy his best efforts.

Not until he smashed in the woodwork around it did he get the chest lid to open.

The sight that then met their astonished eyes almost took away their breath.

The chest was chock full of old-fashioned jeweled watches, small silver and gem encrusted church ornaments, numerous gold snuff-boxes and similar articles, while underneath these was a thick layer of fat-looking bags which, on investigation, proved to be full of Spanish gold pieces.

Altogether the chest held a fortune.

"You find, Bob, but me want half," said the Hindu, with gleaming eyes. "You no want all. No carry away without help. You find, me help carry away. Divide even. What you say?"

"Sure," agreed Bob, who had no objection to this arrangement, though it wouldn't have made any difference if he had kicked.

Singh Small would have taken half anyway.

It is not improbable that if the Hindu had not taken a great liking for the boy that he would have rapped Bob on the head then and there with the hammer, and taken possession of the entire find.

"Looks like some piratical treasure-trove, doesn't it, Singh?" said Bob, his nerves tingling at the idea of possessing even one-half of so much wealth.

The steward agreed with him.

"We divide now. Each take half," he said.

"We can divide the money," said Bob, "but the other stuff—how can we tell its value?"

"No matter about that. You take first pick, then I take piece. That good way. Both satisfied."

Bob thought that was a good way out of the difficulty, so they proceeded to sort the different articles out as their judgment dictated.

When the job was done the boy was of the opinion that he had the best of the bargain; still, he could not be certain about it.

Bob suggested that they each get a small box and nail the stuff up in it.

"Then, when we leave the raft we can take them with us, and nobody will know what is in them," he added.

"You have good head, Bob," replied Singh Small, and the plan was accordingly carried out.

The weather continued fine, and they were ready to leave the key next morning.

"We'll take the brig's log with us," said Bob, "as evidence that we belonged to the Eudora. We must make our statement at the first port we reach that has an American consul. Could you find out the position of this key with the brig's instruments? It will be necessary that an investigation be made into the character of the Eudora's cargo in order to substantiate our charges, and bring Captain Green and his chief mate to justice."

Singh Small's nautical education, however, did not admit of his accomplishing the object aimed at by Bob.

"Unless we can determine the position of this little island it will be like looking for a needle in a haystack to find it again," said Bob, disappointedly.

"Sorry, but can't help you out," replied the steward. "All I know is that Watling's Island is no great way from here."

"But it may be north, south, east, or west from here."

"Most likely southwest or west."

"But there are lots of small islands like this one in the Bahama group, aren't there?"

Singh Small nodded.

"The sea full of little keys same as this—nobody ever stop at them."

The best that Bob could do was to draw a picture of the appearance of the key and then mark its position in connection with the brig's compass.

That showed that the island pointed northeast and southwest.

It was about noon when they pushed off, with their sail set to catch the light breeze then blowing.

In the course of an hour all they could see was the indistinct form of the stranded brig, and this vanished in the waste of water within the next hour.

A strong breeze sprang up after sundown, and propelled the raft faster through the sea.

This continued all night, but the weather dropped to a complete calm next morning, and all that day the raft lay apparently stationary upon the surface of the Caribbean Sea.

They made some progress to the southeast that night under a light wind, which next morning fined down to nothing again, as another dead calm set in.

That night they passed close to Mariguana—a good-sized island—without knowing it, and were floating through Caicas Passage next morning when the sun arose.

The current switched them around to the north of Little Inagua Island, and on the succeeding day they caught a distant view of Great Inagua, which lies about sixty miles north of Cape Maysi, the extreme eastern point of Cuba.

They kept the island in sight all day, saw several sail at a distance, but none came near enough to make them out, and once more night set in.

Three days later they were abreast of Cape Maysi, about twenty miles to the east, and at the entrance to the Northwest Passage.

They sailed along the passage for many days, seeing many vessels, but none close enough for them to signal.

"I'd give something to know where we are," said Bob, one morning, while he and the steward were eating their breakfast. "According to the compass we've been going to the southeast, south and southwest. Where do you suppose we'll fetch up?"

Singh Small hadn't the least idea.

"We ought to run into either Cuba or San Domingo in

the course of time," Bob remarked. "They're so big that I don't see how we can avoid either."

Bob, however, didn't calculate on the Windward Passage between those two islands.

The raft was now almost through it, probably seventy-five miles to the southeast of Cuba, and all of one hundred miles to the northwest of Dame Marie, the most westerly point of Hayti on its southern coast line.

At that moment the raft was headed directly for the northern coast of Jamaica, one hundred and fifty miles southwest.

That afternoon a long, rakish-looking West Indian boat hove in sight, and was seen to be bearing down on them.

"There's a chance for us at last," said Bob, as they watched the craft coming nearer and nearer under the influence of a smacking breeze. "I'm pretty nearly sick of this old raft, which is going goodness knows where."

Singh Small grinned, for he recognized the character of the approaching boat.

He judged it was navigated by either Haytiens or Jamaicans, or native West Indians of some kind, and as he was thoroughly familiar with their customs and dialect, he figured that their troubles would soon be over.

Two hours later, in obedience to the steward's signals, the strange craft hove to close aboard of the raft and sent a boat to them.

Singh Small held a pow-wow with the black fellow in charge, and learned their true position.

An agreement was entered into by which the West Indian was to land them at Kingston, whither he was bound, in exchange for everything on board the raft except the contents of the two treasure boxes, the character of which the Hindu was careful to keep a profound secret.

Accordingly, the native boat came alongside and the transfer was made.

After they had stripped the raft of everything that interested them the West Indians cut lose from it, and resumed their course southward.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

Toward noon next day the craft entered the land-locked harbor of Kingston, for its size one of the best in the world.

The steward and Bob Ford went ashore just as soon as the boat made fast to her wharf, and they secured a small native cart to carry the two heavy treasure boxes to a small inn near the water front.

Leaving the boxes in charge of the proprietor of the inn, who, of course, did not suspect the real nature of their contents, Bob Ford and Singh Small proceeded to the office of the American consul.

Here they told the story of the loss of the Eudora, and the villainy of the skipper and his chief mate—a story that seemed almost incredible to the consul.

He had no reason, however, to doubt the frank statement of the bright-looking American boy who spoke in

such an honest and convincing way, while the greater part of his narrative was corroborated by the Hindu steward.

The consul accompanied them to the offices of the Kingston firm to whom the Eudora was consigned, and there Bob told his story over again in almost the same words.

"We built a raft from material we found on the brig," said Bob, "and thus made our escape from the little key on which we left the Eudora hard and fast aground on her beam ends. We were picked up yesterday afternoon by a West Indian craft bound for this town. If you can send a vessel out, and the key can be found, you will have all the proof you want of the truth of our story and the character of the real cargo of the brig."

The gentlemen held a consultation as to the best thing to be done.

The greatest difficulty in the way, of course, was the inability of either Bob or Singh Small to locate the little island.

Finally the consul decided to pay a visit to a small American cruiser which was in the harbor, and have a conference with her captain.

He did this at once, taking the boy and the Hindu with him.

The captain decided that the matter was of sufficient importance for him to cable the Navy Department for instructions.

By noon next day he was ordered to proceed north and try to locate the position of the stranded brig, and secure the necessary evidence of this alleged crime on the high seas.

Bob and Singh Small were requested to accompany the cruiser.

Before they went they deposited the treasure boxes in the Anglo-Jamaican bank for safety.

The captain of the cruiser sailed to a point that corresponded nearly to the position of the Eudora on the night she was scuttled, as entered in the log by the second mate just before the brig was discovered to be sinking.

Taking this as his base, and making allowances for the presumed distance covered by the sinking craft up to sunrise next morning when she went ashore on the key, the captain began his search for the island, which Bob said could easily be identified by the presence of the stranded brig, or the cluster of plantains in the center of its area.

The cruiser lay to during the night after the search for the key began, so as not to pass it in the darkness, and continued her cruise with the first light of dawn.

Luck assisted them, for at noon that day the island, with the wreck of the Eudora in plain view, was sighted.

The executive officers accompanied Bob and Singh Small ashore.

More than half of the auger holes completed by Ruggles were in plain view.

The officer decided after a thorough examination that the brig could be got off and taken to port.

All the holes were found and plugged securely, a cable was then stretched from the cruiser to the Eudora's stern, and she was pulled into deep water.

A considerable quantity of water still remained in her hold, but this was gradually got rid of on her way back to Kingston by a careful exercise of the damaged pump.

The second pump could not be used, as it wouldn't work.

When the brig was brought up alongside a wharf and unloaded the true character of the bulk of her cargo was revealed.

In the meantime it was learned that Captain Green, his officers and crew had put in at Nassau, in New Providence Island, and from there had taken passage to the United States.

When the exposure of the crime of the Eudora was made at Kingston, the papers of New York had already noted the arrival of Captain Green and survivors of the supposedly lost brig, and had printed his story, which was corroborated by all hands.

The owners presented their claims for the marine insurance, supported by the sworn statements of the officers and crew.

A private despatch detailing the true particulars of the case was sent to the Board of Marine Underwriters, and on the strength of this Captain Green, chief mate Ruggles, and the owners of the Eudora were arrested by United States marshals and haled before the commissioner, who held them pending further developments.

Bob Ford and Singh Small, together with their treasure boxes, were soon en route to New York, where they arrived a week later.

Their appearance in court carried consternation to the hearts of Captain Green and chief mate Ruggles; while their evidence, backed up by sworn documentary proof of the character of the Eudora's cargo, as discovered at Kingston, settled the fate of all the accused, who were immediately convicted and sent to prison for a long term of years.

The Custom House had something to say about the contents of the treasure boxes, and levied a duty on everything but the actual money.

As Bob and the steward received a reward of \$10,000 each for their exposure of the crime of the Eudora, by which the insurance companies involved largely benefited, and as they also received a certain proportion of the salvage money paid to the officers and crew of the American cruiser for saving the brig, they were easily able to redeem their treasure trove.

The Government purchased the old Spanish coins at their value in gold, and the rest of the stuff, with certain exceptions that Bob reserved, was sold at auction.

All told Bob found himself worth something over \$100,000, while Singh Small's share totaled up about \$85,000.

The steward decided he wouldn't go to sea any more, and as an earnest of that purpose he bought a good-sized

hotel out on Long Island, and established himself as the proprietor thereof.

As for Bob, he couldn't get back to Factoryville any too quick; and his appearance one morning, dressed like a magnate's son, at the front door of Warren Hastings' home, caused a great sensation to the family, who had all been at sea over his unexplained disappearance.

He had a thrilling story to tell, which was listened to with breathless attention by Mr. Hastings and his family.

Bob found that the difficulty between the factory owners and their hands had been patched up, and that the mills were in full blast again.

He also found that William Maddox and his pal, Jim Rolfe, had been convicted without his evidence, and that they had been sent to prison for some years.

The secret committee, however, had scored their point in getting the boy out of the way, and it was decided that they could not be arrested as individuals and successfully prosecuted on Bob's unsubstantiated testimony, so the matter against them was allowed to drop.

As Bob Ford was now worth \$100,000 at least, he was a boy entitled to some consideration, therefore when he asked Mr. Hastings if he would act as his guardian that gentleman promptly accepted the trust, and Bob was invited to become one of the family.

He gladly accepted, to the great joy of both Myrtle and Edith Hastings, who regarded him as a young hero, and one of the nicest boys in the world.

He at once attended the Factoryville High School.

When he graduated he went to a well-known academy, and from there to Cornell University, where he eventually graduated with high honors.

A month after he received his degree he was married to Myrtle Hastings, and they went to the West Indies on their bridal trip.

They received a good deal of social attention in Kingston, after Bob introduced himself to the merchants who had acted as consignees for the brig Eudora on that ever-to-be-remembered occasion.

On their return to Factoryville, Warren Hastings took Bob into his firm as a full partner, and there he is to-day, with everything at his disposal to make life worth living, a living example of a boy who was successful Through Thick and Thin.

THE END.

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